

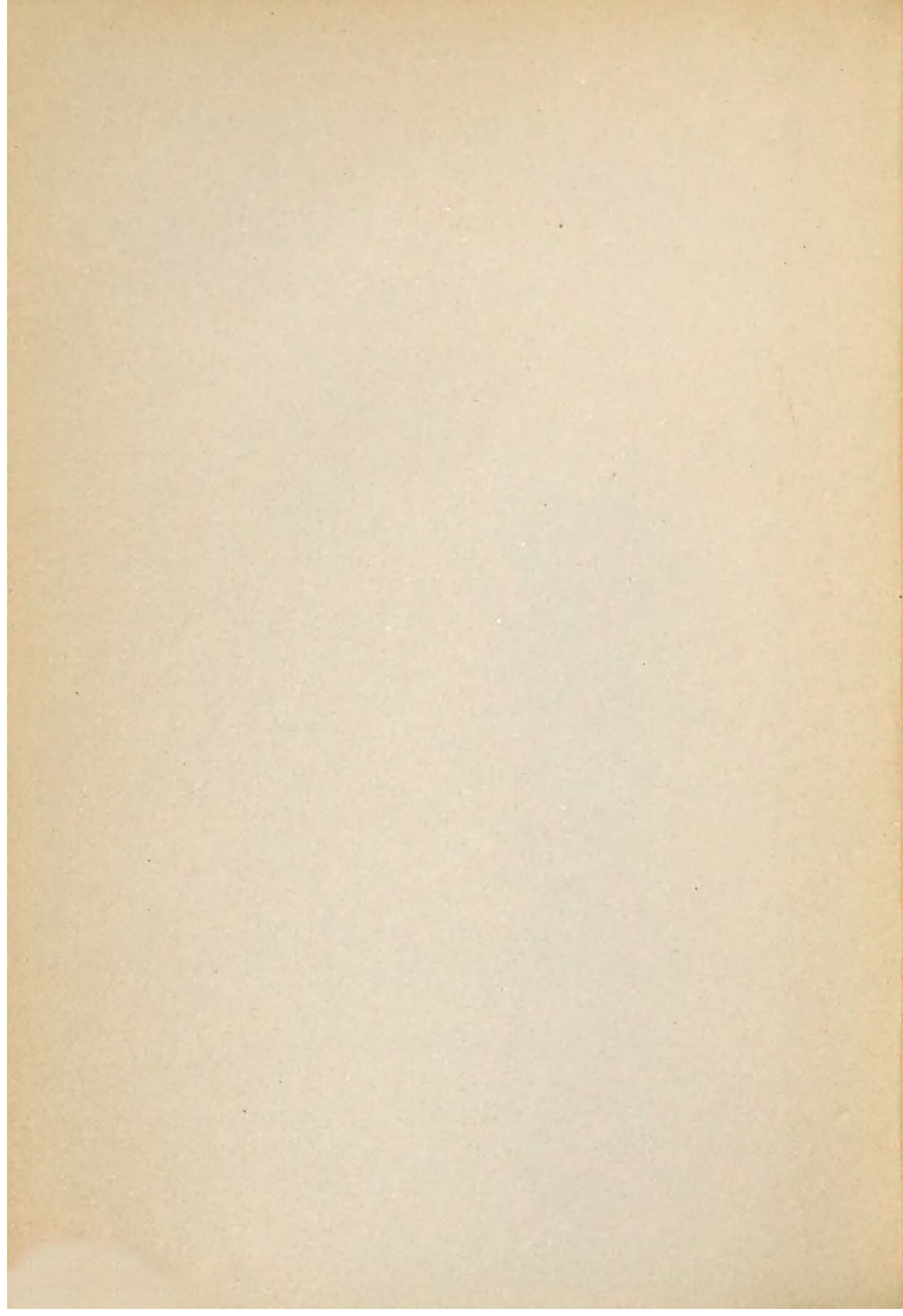


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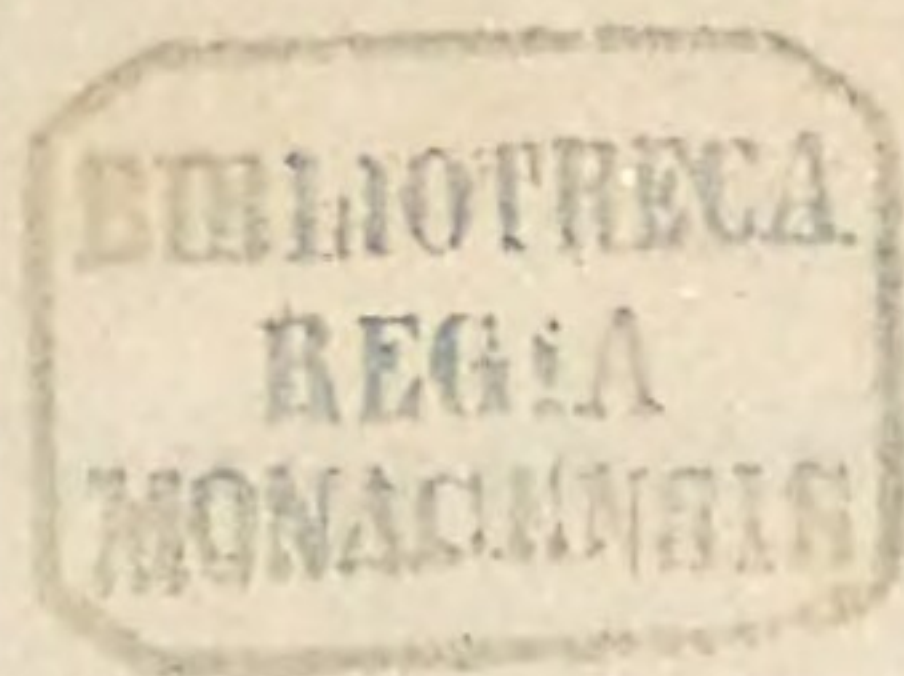
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ILLUMINATION

OR

THE DAMNATION OF THERON WARE

BY

HAROLD FREDERIC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1896.



TO

MARGUERITE THOMAS.

ILLUMINATION.

PART I.

NOTA WIMBLEDON

ILLUMINATION.

CHAPTER I.

No such throng had ever before been seen in the building during all its eight years of existence. People were wedged together most uncomfortably upon the seats; they stood packed in the aisles and overflowed the galleries; at the back, in the shadows underneath these galleries, they formed broad, dense masses about the doors, through which it would be hopeless to attempt a passage.

The light, given out from numerous tin-lined circles of flaring gas jets arranged on the ceiling, fell full upon a thousand uplifted faces—some framed in bonnets or juvenile curls, others bearded or crowned with shining baldness, but all alike under the spell of a dominant emotion which held features in abstracted suspense and focussed every eye upon a common objective point.

The excitement of expectancy reigned upon each

row of countenances, was visible in every attitude—nay, seemed a part of the close, overheated atmosphere itself.

An observer, looking over these compact lines of faces and noting the uniform concentration of eagerness they exhibited, might have guessed that they were watching for either the jury's verdict in some peculiarly absorbing criminal trial or the announcement of the lucky numbers in a great lottery. These two expressions seemed to alternate, and even to mingle vaguely, upon the upturned lineaments of the waiting throng—the hope of some unnamed stroke of fortune and the dread of some adverse decree.

But a glance forward at the object of this universal gaze would have sufficed to shatter both hypotheses. Here was neither a court of justice nor a tombola. It was instead the closing session of the annual Nedahma Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Bishop was about to read out the list of ministerial appointments for the coming year. This list was evidently written in a hand strange to him, and the slow, near-sighted old gentleman, having at last sufficiently rubbed the glasses of his spectacles, and then adjusted them over his nose with annoying deliberation, was now silently rehearsing his task to himself, the while the clergymen round about ground their teeth and restlessly shuffled their feet in impatience.

Upon a closer inspection of the assemblage, there

were a great many of these clergymen. A dozen or more dignified, and for the most part elderly, brethren sat grouped about the Bishop in the pulpit. As many others, not quite so staid in mien, and indeed with here and there almost a suggestion of frivolity in their postures, were seated on the steps leading down from this platform. A score of their fellows sat facing the audience on chairs tightly wedged into the space railed off round the pulpit; and then came five or six rows of pews, stretching across the whole breadth of the church, and almost solidly filled with preachers of the Word.

There were very old men among these—bent and decrepit veterans who had known Lorenzo Dow, and had been ordained by elders who remembered Francis Asbury and even Whitefield. They sat now in front places, leaning forward with trembling and misshapen hands behind their hairy ears, waiting to hear their names read out on the superannuated list, it might be for the last time.

The sight of these venerable fathers in Israel was good to the eyes, conjuring up as it did pictures of a time when a plain and homely people had been served by a fervent and devoted clergy—by preachers who lacked in learning and polish, no doubt, but who gave their lives, without dream of earthly reward, to poverty and to the danger and wearing toil of itinerent missions through the rude frontier settlements. These pictures

had for their primitive accessories log-huts, rough household implements, coarse clothes, and patched old saddles which told of weary years of journeying; but to even the least sympathetic vision there shone upon them the glorified light of the Cross and Crown. Reverend survivors of the heroic times, their very presence there—sitting meekly at the altar-rail to hear again the published record of their uselessness and of their dependence upon church charity—was in the nature of a benediction.

The large majority of those surrounding these patriarchs were middle-aged men, generally of a robust type, with burly shoulders and bushy beards framing shaven upper lips, and who looked for the most part like honest and prosperous farmers attired in their Sunday clothes. As exceptions to this rule there were scattered stray specimens of a more urban class, worthies with neatly trimmed whiskers, white neckcloths, and even indications of hair-oil—all eloquent of citified charges; and now and again the eye singled out a striking and scholarly face, at once strong and simple, and instinctively referred it to the faculty of one of the several theological seminaries belonging to the Conference.

The effect of these faces as a whole was toward goodness, candour, and imperturbable self-complacency rather than learning or mental astuteness, and curiously enough it wore its pleasantest aspect on the countenances

of the older men. The impress of zeal and moral worth seemed to diminish by regular gradations as one passed to younger faces, and among the very beginners, who had been ordained only within the past day or two, this decline was peculiarly marked. It was almost a relief to note the relative smallness of their number, so plainly was it to be seen that they were not the men their forebears had been.

And if those aged, worn-out preachers facing the pulpit had gazed instead backward over the congregation, it may be that here too their old eyes would have detected a difference—what at least they would have deemed a decline.

But nothing was farther from the minds of the members of the First M. E. Church of Tecumseh than the suggestion that they were not an improvement on those who had gone before them. They were undoubtedly the smartest and most important congregation within the limits of the Nedahma Conference, and this new church edifice of theirs represented alike a scale of outlay and a standard of progressive taste in devotional architecture unique in the Methodism of that whole section of the State. They had a right to be proud of themselves, too. They belonged to the substantial order of the community, with perhaps not so many very rich men as the Presbyterians had, but, on the other hand, with far fewer extremely poor folk than the Baptists

were encumbered with. The pews in the first four rows of their church rented for \$100 apiece—quite up to the Presbyterian high-water mark, and they now had almost abolished free pews altogether. The oyster suppers given by their Ladies' Aid Society, in the basement of the church, during the winter took established rank among the fashionable events in Tecumseh's social calendar.

A comprehensive and satisfied perception of these advantages was uppermost in the minds of this local audience as they waited for the Bishop to begin his reading. They had entertained this Bishop, and his Presiding Elders, and the rank and file of common preachers, in a style which could not have been remotely approached by any other congregation in the Conference. Where else, one would like to know, could the Bishop have been domiciled in a Methodist house where he might have a sitting-room all to himself, with his bedroom leading out of it? Every clergyman present had been provided for in a private residence—even down to the Licensed Exhorters, who were not really ministers at all when you came to think of it, and who might well thank their stars that the Conference had assembled among such open-handed people. There existed a dim feeling that these Licensed Exhorters—an uncouth crew, with country storekeepers and lumber-men, and even a horse-doctor, among their number—had taken rather too

much for granted, and were not exhibiting quite the proper degree of gratitude over their reception.

But a more important issue hung now imminent in the balance—Was Tecumseh to be fairly and honourably rewarded for her hospitality, by being given the pastor of her choice?

All were agreed—at least among those who paid pew-rents—upon the great importance of a change in the pulpit of the First M. E. Church. A change in persons must of course take place, for their present pastor had exhausted the three-year maximum of the itinerant system; but there was needed much more than that. For a handsome and expensive church building like this, and with such a modern and go-ahead congregation, it was simply a vital necessity to secure an attractive and fashionable preacher. They had held their own against the Presbyterians these past few years only by the most strenuous efforts, and under the depressing disadvantage of a minister who preached dreary out-of-date sermons, and who lacked even the most rudimentary sense of social distinctions. The Presbyterians had captured the new cashier of the Adams County Bank, who had always gone to the Methodist church in the town he came from, but now was lost solely because of this tiresome old fossil of theirs; and there were numerous other instances of the same sort, scarcely less

grievous. That this state of things must be altered was clear.

The unusually large local attendance upon the sessions of the Conference had given some of the more guileless of visiting brethren a high notion of Tecumseh's piety; and perhaps even the most sophisticated stranger never quite realised how strictly it was to be explained by the anxiety to pick out a suitable champion for the fierce Presbyterian competition. Big gatherings assembled evening after evening to hear the sermons of those selected to preach, and the church had been almost impossibly crowded at each of the three Sunday services. Opinions had naturally differed a good deal during the earlier stages of this scrutiny, but after last night's sermon there could be but one feeling. The man for Tecumseh was the Reverend Theron Ware.

The choice was an admirable one, from points of view much more exalted than those of the local congregation.

You could see Mr. Ware sitting there at the end of the row inside the altar-rail—the tall, slender young man with the broad white brow, thoughtful eyes, and features moulded into that regularity of strength which used to characterise the American Senatorial type, in those far-away days of clean-shaven faces and moderate incomes, before the War. The bright-faced, comely and vivacious young woman in the second side pew was his

wife; and Tecumseh noted with approbation that she knew how to dress. There were really no two better or worthier people in the building than this young couple, who sat waiting along with the rest to hear their fate. But unhappily they had come to know of the effort being made to bring them to Tecumseh, and their simple pride in the triumph of the husband's fine sermon had become swallowed up in a terribly anxious conflict of hope and fear. Neither of them could maintain a satisfactory show of composure as the decisive moment approached. The vision of translation from poverty and obscurity to such a splendid post as this—truly it was too dazzling for tranquil nerves.

The tedious Bishop had at last begun to call his roll of names, and the good people of Tecumseh mentally ticked them off, one by one, as the list expanded. They felt that it was like this Bishop—an unimportant and commonplace figure in Methodism, not to be mentioned in the same breath with Simpson and Janes and Kingsley—that he should begin with the backwoods counties, and thrust all these remote and pitifully rustic stations ahead of their own metropolitan charge. To these they attended but listlessly—indifferent alike to the joy and to the dismay which he was scattering among the divines before him.

The announcements were being doled out with stumbling hesitation. After each one a little half-rust-

ling movement through the crowded rows of clergymen passed mute judgment upon the cruel blow this brother had received, the reward justly given to this other, the favouritism by which a third had profited. The presiding elders, whose work all this was, stared with gloomy and impersonal abstraction down upon the rows of black-coated humanity spread before them. The ministers returned this fixed and perfunctory gaze with pale, set faces, only feebly masking the emotions which each new name stirred somewhere among them. The Bishop droned on laboriously, mispronouncing words and repeating himself as if he were reading a catalogue of unfamiliar seeds.

“First Church of Tecumseh—Brother Abram G. Tisdale!”

There was no doubt about it! These were actually the words that had been uttered. After all this outlay, all this lavish hospitality, all this sacrifice of time and patience in sitting through those sermons, to draw from the grab-bag nothing better than—a Tisdale!

A hum of outraged astonishment—half groan, half wrathful snort—bounded along from pew to pew throughout the body of the church. An echo of it reached the Bishop, and so confused him that he haltingly repeated the obnoxious line. Every local eye turned as by intuition to where the calamitous Tisdale sat, and fastened malignantly upon him.

Could anything be worse! This Brother Tisdale was past fifty—a spindling, rickety, gaunt old man, with a long, horse-like head and vacantly solemn face, who kept one or the other of his hands continually fumbling his bony jaw. He had been withdrawn from routine service for a number of years, doing a little insurance canvassing on his own account, and also travelling for the Book Concern. Now that he wished to return to parochial work, the richest prize in the whole list—Tecumseh—was given to him—to him, who had never been asked to preach at a Conference, and whose archaic nasal singing of “Greenland’s Icy Mountains” had made even the Licensed Exhorters grin! It was too intolerably dreadful to think of!

An embittered whisper to the effect that Tisdale was the Bishop’s cousin ran round from pew to pew. This did not happen to be true, but indignant Tecumseh gave it entire credence. The throngs about the doors dwindled as by magic, and the aisles cleared. Local interest was dead, and even some of the pewholders rose and made their way out. One of these murmured audibly to his neighbours as he departed that *his* pew could be had now for sixty dollars.

So it happened that when, a little later on, the appointment of Theron Ware to Octavius was read out, none of the people of Tecumseh either noted or cared. They had been deeply interested in him so long as it

seemed likely that he was to come to them—before their clearly expressed desire for him had been so monstrously ignored. But now what became of him was no earthly concern of theirs.

After the Doxology had been sung and the Conference formally declared ended, the Wares would fain have escaped from the flood of handshakings and boisterous farewells which spread over the front part of the church. But the clergymen were unusually insistent upon demonstrations of cordiality among themselves—the more, perhaps, because it was evident that the friendliness of their local hosts had suddenly evaporated—and of all men in the world the present incumbent of the Octavius pulpit now bore down upon them with noisy effusiveness and defied evasion.

“Brother Ware—we have never been interduced—but let me clasp your hand! And—Sister Ware, I presume—yours too!”

He was a portly man, who held his head back so that his face seemed all jowl and mouth and sandy chin-whisker. He smiled broadly upon them, with half-closed eyes, and shook hands again.

“I said to ’em,” he went on, with loud pretence of heartiness, “the minute I heerd your name called out for our dear Octavius, ‘I must go over an’ interduce myself.’ It will be a heavy cross to part with those dear people, Brother Ware, but if anything could wean me to

the notion, so to speak, it would be the knowledge that you are to take up my labours in their midst. Perhaps—ah!—perhaps they *are* jest a trifle close in money matters, but they come out strong on revivals. They'll need a good deal o' stirrin' up about parsonage expenses; but oh! such seasons of grace as we've experienced there together!" He shook his head and closed his eyes altogether, as if transported by his memories.

Brother Ware smiled faintly in decorous response, and bowed in silence, but his wife resented the unctuous beaming of content on the other's wide countenance, and could not restrain her tongue.

"You seem to bear up tolerably well under this heavy cross, as you call it," she said sharply.

"The will o' the Lord, Sister Ware—the will o' the Lord," he responded, disposed for the instant to put on his pompous manner with her, and then deciding to smile again as he moved off. The circumstance that he was to get an additional \$ 300 yearly in his new place was not mentioned between them.

By a mutual impulse the young couple, when they had at last gained the cool open air, crossed the street to the side where overhanging trees shaded the infrequent lamps and they might be comparatively alone. The wife had taken her husband's arm, and pressed

closely upon it as they walked. For a time no word passed, but finally he said, in a grave voice—

“It is hard upon you, poor girl.”

Then she stopped short, buried her face against his shoulder, and fell to sobbing.

He strove with gentle whispered remonstrance to win her from this mood, and after a few moments she lifted her head and they resumed their walk, she wiping her eyes as they went.

“I couldn’t keep it in a minute longer,” she said, catching her breath between phrases. “Oh! *why* do they behave so badly to us, Theron?”

He smiled down momentarily upon her as they moved along, and patted her hand.

“Somebody must have the poor places, Alice,” he said consolingly. “I am a young man yet, remember. We must take our turn, and be patient. For ‘we know that all things work together for good.’”

“And your sermon was so head-and-shoulders above all the others!” she went on breathlessly. “Everybody said so. And Mrs. Parshall heard it so *direct* that you were to be sent here, and I know she told everybody how much I was lotting on it. I wish we could go right off to-night without going to her house; I shall be ashamed to look her in the face. And of course she knows we’re poked off to that miserable Octavius. Why,

Theron, they tell me it's a worse place even than we've got now."

"Oh, not at all," he put in reassuringly. "It has grown to be a large town—oh, quite twice the size of Tyre. It's a great Irish place, I've heard. Our own church seems to be a good deal run down there. We must build it up again; and the salary *is* better—a little."

But he too was depressed, and they walked on toward their temporary lodging in a silence full of mutual grief. It was not until they had come within sight of this goal that he prefaced by a little sigh of resignation these further words:

"Come—let us make the best of it, my girl! After all, we are in the hands of the Lord."

"Oh, don't, Theron!" she said hastily. "Don't talk to me about the Lord to-night; I can't bear it!"

CHAPTER II.

"THERON! come out here! This is the funniest thing we have heard yet!"

Mrs. Ware stood on the platform of her new kitchen stoop. The bright flood of May-morning sunshine completely enveloped her girlish form, clad in a simple, fresh-starched calico gown, and shone in golden patches upon her light-brown hair. She had a smile on her face as she looked down at the milk-boy standing on the bottom step—a smile of a doubtful sort, stormily mirthful.

"Come out a minute, Theron!" she called again, and in obedience to the summons the tall, lank figure of her husband appeared in the open doorway behind her. A long, loose, open dressing-gown dangled to his knees, and his sallow, clean-shaven, thoughtful face wore a morning undress expression of youthful good nature. He leaned against the door-sill, crossed his large carpet-slippers, and looked up into the sky, drawing a long satisfied breath.

"What a beautiful morning!" he exclaimed. "The

elms over there are full of robins. We must get up earlier these mornings and take some walks."

His wife indicated the boy with the milk-pail on his arm by a wave of her hand.

"Guess what he tells me!" she said. "It wasn't a mistake at all, our getting no milk yesterday or the Sunday before. It seems that that's the custom here, at least so far as the parsonage is concerned."

"What's the matter, boy?" asked the young minister, drawling his words a little, and putting a sense of placid irony into them. "Don't the cows give milk on Sunday, then?"

The boy was not going to be chaffed. "Oh, I'll bring you milk fast enough on Sundays if you give me the word," he said with nonchalance. "Only it won't last long."

"How do you mean—'won't last long'?" asked Mrs. Ware briskly.

The boy liked her, both for herself and for the doughnuts fried with her own hands which she gave him on his morning round. He dropped his half-defiant tone.

"The thing of it's this," he explained. "Every new minister starts in saying we can deliver to this house on Sundays, an' then gives us notice to stop before the month's out. It's the trustees that does it."

The Rev. Theron Ware uncrossed his feet and

moved out on to the stoop beside his wife. "What's that you say?" he interjected. "Don't *they* take milk on Sundays?"

"Nope," answered the boy.

The young couple looked each other in the face for a puzzled moment, then broke into a laugh.

"Well, we'll try it, any way," said the preacher. "You can go on bringing it Sundays till—till——"

"Till you cave in an' tell me to stop," put in the boy. "All right," and he was off on the instant, the dipper jangling loud incredulity in his pail as he went.

The Wares exchanged another glance as he disappeared round the corner of the house, and another mutual laugh seemed imminent. Then the wife's face clouded over, and she thrust her under lip a trifle forward out of its place in the straight and gently firm profile.

"It's just what Wendell Phillips said," she declared. "The Puritan's idea of hell is a place where everybody has to mind his own business."

The young minister stroked his chin thoughtfully, and let his gaze wander over the back-yard in silence. The garden parts had not been spaded up, but lay a useless stretch of muddy earth, broken only by last year's cabbage-stumps and the general litter of dead roots and vegetation. The door of the tenantless chicken-coop hung wide open. Before it was a great heap of

ashes and cinders, soaked into grimy hardness by the recent spring rains; and nearer still an ancient chopping-block, round which were scattered old weatherbeaten hardwood knots which had defied the axe, parts of broken barrels and packing-boxes, and a nameless *débris* of tin cans, clam-shells, and general rubbish. It was pleasanter to lift the eyes and look across the neighbours' fences to the green, waving tops of the elms on the street beyond. How lofty and beautiful they were in the morning sunlight, and with what matchless charm came the song of the robins, freshly installed in their haunts among the new pale green leaves! Above them, in the fresh, scented air, glowed the great blue dome, radiant with light and the purification of spring.

Theron lifted his thin, long-fingered hand, and passed it in a slow arch of movement to comprehend this glorious upper picture.

"What matter any one's idea of hell," he said in soft, grave tones, "when we have that to look at, and listen to, and fill our lungs with? It seems to me that we never *feel* quite so sure of God's goodness at other times as we do in these wonderful new mornings of spring."

The wife followed his gesture, and her eyes rested for a brief moment, with pleased interest, upon the trees and the sky. Then they reverted, with a harsher scrutiny, to the immediate foreground.

"Those Van Sizars ought to be downright ashamed of themselves," she said, "to leave everything in such a muss as this. You *must* see about getting a man to clean up the yard, Theron. It's no use your thinking of doing it yourself. In the first place, it wouldn't look quite the thing; and, second, you'd never get at it in all your born days. Or, if a man would cost too much, we might get a boy. I dare say Harvey would come around, after he'd finished with his milk-route in the forenoon. We could give him his dinner, you know, and I'd bake him some cookies. He's got the greatest sweet-tooth you ever heard of. And then perhaps if we gave him a quarter, or say half a dollar, he'd be quite satisfied. I'll speak to him in the morning. We can save a dollar or so that way."

"I suppose every little does help," commented Mr. Ware, with a doleful lack of conviction. Then his face brightened. "I'll tell you what let's do!" he exclaimed. "Get on your street dress, and we'll take a long walk, way out into the country. You've never seen the basin where they float the log-rafts in, or the big saw-mills. The hills beyond give you almost mountain effects, they are so steep; and they say there's a sulphur spring among the slate on the hillside, somewhere, with trees all about it, and we could take some sandwiches with us——"

"You forget," put in Mrs. Ware; "those trustees are coming at eleven."

"So they are," assented the young minister, with something like a sigh. He cast another reluctant, lingering glance at the sunlit elm-boughs, and turning, went indoors.

He loitered for an aimless minute in the kitchen, where his wife, her sleeves rolled to the elbow, now resumed the interrupted washing of the breakfast dishes—perhaps with vague visions of that ever-receding time to come when they might have a hired girl to do such work. Then he wandered off into the room beyond, which served them alike as living-room and study, and let his eye run along the two rows of books that constituted his library. He saw nothing which he wanted to read. Finally he did take down "Paley's Evidences," and seated himself in the big arm-chair—that costly and oversized anomaly among his humble household gods; but the book lay unopened on his knee, and his eyelids half closed themselves in sign of reverie.

This was his third charge—this Octavius, which they both knew they were going to dislike so much.

The first had been in the pleasant dairy and hop country, many miles to the south—on another watershed and among a different kind of people. Perhaps, in truth, the grinding labour, the poverty of ideas, the systematic selfishness of later rural experience, had not been lacking there, but they played no part in the memories which now he passed in tender review. He

recalled instead the warm sunshine on the fertile expanse of fields; the sleek, well-fed herds of "milkers" coming lowing down the road under the maples; the prosperous and hospitable farmhouses, with their orchards in blossom and their spacious red barns; the bountiful boiled dinners which cheery housewives served up with their own skilled hands. Of course, he admitted to himself, it would not be the same if he were to go back there again. He was conscious of having moved along—was it, after all, an advance?—to a point where it was unpleasant to sit at table with the unfragrant hired man, and still worse to encounter the bucolic confusion between the functions of knives and forks. But in those happy days—young, zealous, himself farm-bred—these trifles had been invisible to him, and life there among those kindly husbandmen had seemed, by contrast with the gaunt surroundings and gloomy rule of the theological seminary, luxuriously abundant and free.

It was there, too, that the crowning blessedness of his youth—nay, should he not say of all his days?—had come to him. There he had first seen Alice Hastings, the bright-eyed, frank-faced, serenely self-reliant girl, who now, less than four years thereafter, could be heard washing the dishes out in the parsonage kitchen.

How wonderful she had seemed to him then! How beautiful and all-beneficent the miracle still appeared!

Though herself the daughter of a farmer, her presence on a visit within the borders of his remote country charge had seemed to make everything there a hundred times more countrified than it had ever been before. She was fresh from the refinements of a town seminary; she read books; it was known that she could play upon the piano. Her clothes, her manners, her way of speaking, the readiness of her thoughts and sprightly tongue—not least, perhaps, the imposing current understanding as to her father's wealth—placed her on a glorified pinnacle far away from the girls of the neighbourhood. These honest and good-hearted creatures, indeed, called ceaseless attention to her superiority by their deference and open-mouthed admiration, and treated it as the most natural thing in the world that their young minister should be visibly “taken” with her.

Theron Ware, in truth, left this first pastorate of his the following spring in a transfiguring halo of romance. His new appointment was to Tyre, a somewhat distant village of traditional local pride and substance, and he was to be married only a day or so before entering upon his pastoral duties there. The good people among whom he had begun his ministry took kindly credit to themselves that he had met his bride while she was “visiting round” their country-side. In part by jocose inquiries addressed to the expectant groom, in part by the confidences of the postmaster at the Corners con-

cerning the bulk and frequency of the correspondence passing between Theron and the now remote Alice, they had followed the progress of the courtship through the autumn and winter with friendly zest. When he returned from the Conference, to say good-bye and confess the happiness that awaited him, they gave him a "donation"—quite as if he were a married pastor with a home of his own, instead of a shy young bachelor, who received his guests and their contributions in the house where he boarded.

He went away with tears of mingled regret and proud joy in his eyes, thinking a good deal upon their predictions of a distinguished career before him, feeling infinitely strengthened and upborne by the hearty fervour of their God-speed, and taking with him nearly two waggon-loads of vegetables, apples, canned preserves, assorted furniture, glass dishes, cheeses, pieced bed-quilts, honey, feathers, and kitchen utensils.

Of the three years' term in Tyre it was pleasantest to dwell upon the beginning.

The young couple—after being married out at Alice's home in an adjoining county, under the depressing conditions of a hopelessly bedridden mother, and a father and brothers whose perceptions were obviously closed to the advantages of a matrimonial connection with Methodism—came straight to the house which their new congregation rented as a parsonage. The impulse of reac-

tion from the rather grim cheerlessness of their wedding lent fresh gaiety to their light-hearted, whimsical start at housekeeping. They had never laughed so much in all their lives as they did now in these first months—over their weird ignorance of domestic details, with its mishaps, mistakes, and entertaining discoveries; over the comical superabundances and shortcomings of their “donation” outfit; over the thousand and one quaint experiences of their novel relation to each other, to the congregation, and to the world of Tyre at large.

Theron, indeed, might be said never to have laughed before. Up to that time no friendly student of his character, cataloguing his admirable qualities, would have thought of including among them a sense of humour, much less a bent toward levity. Neither his early strenuous battle to get away from the farm and achieve such education as should serve to open to him the gates of professional life, nor the later wave of religious enthusiasm which caught him up as he stood on the borderland of manhood, and swept him off into a veritable new world of views and aspirations, had been a likely school of merriment. People had prized him for his innocent candour and guileless mind, for his good heart, his pious zeal, his modesty about gifts notably above the average, but it had occurred to none to suspect in him a latent funny side.

But who could be solemn where Alice was?—Alice

in a quandary over the complications of her cooking-stove—Alice boiling her potatoes all day and her eggs for half-an-hour—Alice ordering twenty pounds of steak and half-a-pound of sugar, and striving to extract a breakfast beverage from the unground coffee-bean? Clearly not so tenderly fond and sympathetic a husband as Theron. He began by laughing because she laughed, and grew by swift stages to comprehend, then to frankly share, her amusement. From this it seemed only a step to the development of a humour of his own, doubling, as it were, their sportive resources. He found himself discovering a new droll aspect in men and things; his phraseology took on a dryly playful form, to fittingly present conceits which danced up, unabashed, quite into the presence of lofty and majestic truths. He got from this nothing but satisfaction; it obviously involved increased claims to popularity among his parishioners, and consequently magnified powers of usefulness; and it made life so much more a joy and a thing to be thankful for. Often, in the midst of the exchange of merry quip and whimsical suggestion, bright blossoms on that tree of strength and knowledge which he felt expanding now with a mighty outward pushing in all directions, he would lapse into deep gravity, and ponder with a swelling heart the vast unspeakable marvel of his blessedness, in being thus enriched and humanised by daily communion with the most worshipful of womankind.

This happy and good young couple took the affections of Tyre by storm. The Methodist Church there had at no time held its head very high among the denominations, and for some years back had been in a deplorably sinking state, owing first to the secession of the Free Methodists, and then to the incumbency of a pastor who scandalised the community by marrying a black man to a white woman. But the Wares changed all this. Within a month the report of Theron's charm and force in the pulpit was crowding the church building to its utmost capacity, and that, too, with some of Tyre's best people. Equally winning was the atmosphere of jollity and juvenile high spirits which pervaded the parsonage under these new conditions, and which Theron and Alice seemed to diffuse wherever they went.

Thus swimmingly their first year sped, amid universal acclaim. Mrs. Ware had a recognised social place, quite outside the restricted limits of Methodism, and shone in it with an unflagging brilliancy altogether beyond the traditions of Tyre. Delightful as she was in other people's houses, she was still more naïvely fascinating in her own quaint and somewhat harum-scarum domicile, and the drab, two-storeyed, tin-roofed little parsonage might well have rattled its clap-boards to see if it was not in dreamland, so gay was the company, so light were the hearts, which it sheltered in these new days. As for Theron, the period was one of incredible fructification

and output. He scarcely recognised for his own the mind which now was reaching out on all sides with the arms of an octopus, exploring unsuspected mines of thought, bringing in rich treasures of deduction, assimilating, building, propounding, as if by some force quite independent of him. He could not look without blinking timidity at the radiance of the path stretched out before him, leading upward to dazzling heights of greatness.

At the end of this first year the Wares suddenly discovered that they were \$800 in debt.

The second year was spent in arriving, by slow stages and with a cruel wealth of pathetic detail, at a realisation of what being \$800 in debt meant.

It was not in their elastic and buoyant natures to grasp the full significance of the thing at once, or easily. Their position in the social structure, too, was all against clear-sightedness in material matters. A general, for example, uniformed and in the saddle, advancing through the streets with his staff in the proud wake of his division's massed walls of bayonets, cannot be imagined as quailing at the glance thrown at him by his tailor on the side-walk. Similarly, a man invested with sacerdotal authority, who baptizes, marries, and buries, who delivers judgments from the pulpit which may not be questioned in his hearing, and who receives from all his fellow-men a special deference of manner and speech,

is in the nature of things prone to see the grocer's book and the butcher's bill through the little end of the telescope.

The Wares at the outset had thought it right to trade as exclusively as possible with members of their own church society. This loyalty became a principal element of martyrdom. Theron had his creditors seated in serried rows before him Sunday after Sunday. Alice had her critics consolidated among those whom it was her chief duty to visit and profess friendship for. These situations now began by regular gradations to unfold their terrors. At the first intimation of discontent the Wares made what seemed to them a sweeping reduction in expenditure. When they heard that Brother Potter had spoken of them as "poor pay," they dismissed their hired girl. A little later Theron brought himself to drop a laborious casual suggestion as to a possible increase of salary, and saw with sinking spirits the faces of the stewards freeze with dumb disapprobation. Then Alice paid a visit to her parents, only to find her brothers doggedly hostile to the notion of her being helped, and her father so much under their influence that the paltry sum he dared offer barely covered the expenses of her journey. With another turn of the screw, they sold the piano she had brought with her from home, and cut themselves down to the bare necessities of life, neither receiving company nor going out. They never laughed now, and even smiles grew rare.

By this time Theron's sermons, preached under that stony glare of people to whom he owed money, had degenerated to a pitiful level of commonplace. As a consequence the attendance became once more confined to the insufficient membership of the church, and the trustees complained of grievously diminished receipts. When the Wares, grown desperate, ventured upon the experiment of trading outside the bounds of the congregation the trustees complained again, this time peremptorily.

Thus the second year dragged itself miserably to an end. Nor was relief possible, because the Presiding Elder knew something of the circumstances, and felt it his duty to send Theron back for a third year, to pay his debts, and drain the cup of disciplinary medicine to its dregs.

The worst has been told. Beginning in utter blackness, this third year, in the second month, brought a change as welcome as it was unlooked for. An elderly and important citizen of Tyre, by name Abram Beekman, whom Theron knew slightly, and had on occasion seen sitting in one of the back pews near the door, called one morning at the parsonage, and electrified its inhabitants by expressing a desire to wipe off all their old scores for them, and give them a fresh start in life. As he put the suggestion, they could find no excuse for rejecting it. He had watched them, and heard a good

deal about them, and took a fatherly sort of interest in them. He did not deprecate their regarding the aid he proffered them in the nature of a loan, but they were to make themselves perfectly easy about it, and never return it at all unless they could spare it sometime with entire convenience, and felt that they wanted to do so. As this amazing windfall finally took shape, it enabled the Wares to live respectably through the year, and to leave Tyre with something over \$100 in hand.

It enabled them, too, to revive in a chastened form their old dream of ultimate success and distinction for Theron. He had demonstrated clearly enough to himself, during that brief season of unrestrained effulgence, that he had within him the making of a great pulpit orator. He set to work now, with resolute purpose, to puzzle out and master all the principles which underlie this art, and all the tricks that adorn its superstructure. He studied it, fastened his thoughts upon it, talked daily with Alice about it. In the pulpit, addressing those people who had so darkened his life and crushed the first happiness out of his home, he withheld himself from any oratorical display which could afford them gratification. He put aside, as well, the thought of attracting once more the non-Methodists of Tyre, whose early enthusiasm had spread such pitfalls for his unwary feet. He practised effects now by piecemeal, with an alert

ear, and calculation in every tone. An ambition, at once embittered and tearfully solicitous, possessed him.

He reflected now, this morning, with a certain incredulous interest, upon that unworthy epoch in his life history, which seemed so far behind him, and yet had come to a close only a few weeks ago. The opportunity had been given him, there at the Tecumseh Conference, to reveal his quality. He had risen to its full limit of possibilities, and preached a great sermon in a manner which he at least knew was unapproachable. He had made his most powerful bid for the prize place, had trebly deserved success—and had been banished instead to Octavius!

The curious thing was that he did not resent his failure. Alice had taken it hard, but he himself was conscious of a sense of spiritual gain. The influence of the Conference, with its songs and seasons of prayer and high pressure of emotional excitement, was still strong upon him. It seemed years and years since the religious side of him had been so stirred into motion. He felt, as he lay back in the chair and folded his hands over the book on his knee, that he had indeed come forth from the fire purified and strengthened. The ministry to souls diseased beckoned him with a new and urgent significance. He smiled to remember that Mr. Beekman, speaking in his shrewd and pointed

way, had asked him whether, looking it all over, he didn't think it would be better for him to study law, with a view to sliding out of the ministry when a good chance offered. It amazed him now to recall that he had taken this hint seriously, and even gone to the length of finding out what books law students began upon.

Thank God, all that was past and gone now! The Call sounded resonant and imperative in his ears, and there was no impulse of his heart, no fibre of his being, which did not stir in devout response. He closed his eyes to be the more wholly alone with the spirit that moved him.

The jangling of a bell in the hallway broke sharply upon his meditations, and on the instant his wife thrust in her head from the kitchen.

"You'll have to go to the door, Theron," she warned him in a loud, swift whisper. "I'm not fit to be seen. It's the trustees."

"All right," he said, and rose slowly from sprawling recumbency to his feet. "I'll go."

"And don't forget," she added strenuously, "I believe in Levi Gorringer. I've seen him go past here with his rod and fish-basket twice in eight days, and that's a good sign. He's got a soft side somewhere. And just keep a stiff upper lip about the gas, and don't

you let them Jew you down a solitary cent on that sidewalk."

"All right," said Theron again, and moved reluctantly toward the hall-door.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN the three trustees had been shown in by the Rev. Mr. Ware, and had taken seats, an awkward little pause ensued. The young minister looked doubtingly from one face to another, the while they glanced with inquiring interest about the room, noting the pictures and appraising the furniture in their minds.

The obvious leader of the party, Loren Pierce, a rich quarryman, was an old man of medium size and mean attire, with a square, beardless face, as hard and impassive in expression as one of his blocks of limestone. The irregular and thin-lipped mouth, slightly sunk and shut with vice-like firmness, the short snub nose, and the little eyes squinting from half-closed lids beneath slightly marked brows, seemed scarcely to attain to the dignity of features, but evaded attention instead, as if feeling that they were only there at all from plain necessity, and ought not to be taken into account. Mr. Pierce's face did not know how to smile—what was the use of smiles?—but its whole surface radiated secretiveness. Portrayed on canvas by a master brush,

with a ruff or red robe for masquerade, generations of imaginative amateurs would have seen in it vast-reaching plots, the skeletons of a dozen dynastic cupboards, the guarded mysteries of half a century's international diplomacy. The amateurs would have been wrong again. There was nothing behind Mr. Pierce's juiceless countenance more weighty than a general determination to exact seven per cent. for his money, and some specific notions about capturing certain brick-yards which were interfering with his quarry-sales. But Octavius watched him shamble along its side-walks quite as the Vienna of dead and forgotten yesterday might have watched Metternich.

Erastus Winch was of a breezier sort—a florid, stout, and sandy man, who spent most of his life driving over evil country roads in a buggy, securing orders for dairy furniture and certain allied lines of farm utensils. This practice had given him a loud voice and a deceptively hearty manner, to which the other avocation of cheese-buyer, which he pursued at the Board of Trade meetings every Monday afternoon, had added a considerable command of persuasive yet non-committal language. To look at him, still more to hear him, one would have sworn he was a good fellow, a trifle rough and noisy perhaps, but all right at bottom. But the county clerk of Dearborn County could have told you of agriculturists who knew Erastus from long and unhappy experience,

and who held him to be even a tighter man than Loren Pierce in the matter of a mortgage.

The third trustee, Levi Gorringer, set one wondering at the very first glance what on earth he was doing in that company. Those who had known him longest had the least notion, but it may be added that no one knew him well. He was a lawyer, and had lived in Octavius for upwards of ten years; that is to say, since early manhood. He had an office on the main street, just under the principal photograph gallery. Doubtless he was sometimes in this office, but his fellow-townsmen saw him more often in the street doorway, with the stairs behind him, and the flaring show-cases of the photographer on either side, standing with his hands in his pockets and an unlighted cigar in his mouth, looking at nothing in particular. About every other day he went off after breakfast into the country round about, sometimes with a rod, sometimes with a gun, but always alone. He was a bachelor, and slept in a room at the back of his office, cooking some of his meals himself, getting others at a restaurant close by. Though he had little visible practice, he was understood to be well-to-do, and even more, and people tacitly inferred that he "shaved notes." The Methodists of Octavius looked upon him as a queer fish, and through nearly a dozen years had never quite outgrown their hebdomadal tendency to surprise at seeing him enter their church. He

had never, it is true, professed religion, but they had elected him as a trustee now for a number of terms, all the same, partly because he was their only lawyer, partly because he, like both his colleagues, held a mortgage on the church edifice and lot. In person Mr. Gorringe was a slender man, with a skin of a clear, uniform citron-tint, black waving hair and dark grey eyes, and a thin high-featured face. He wore a moustache and pointed chin-tuft, and though he was of New England parentage, and had never been farther south than Ocean Grove, he presented a general effect of old Mississippian traditions and tastes startlingly at variance with the standards of Dearborn County Methodism. Nothing could convince some of the elder sisters that he was not a drinking man.

The three visitors had completed their survey of the room now, and Loren Pierce emitted a dry, harsh little cough, as a signal that business was about to begin. At this sound Winch drew up his feet, and Gorringe untied a parcel of account-books and papers that he held on his knee. Theron felt that his countenance must be exhibiting to the assembled brethren an unfortunate sense of helplessness in their hands. He tried to look more resolute, and forced his lips into a smile.

“Brother Gorringe allus acts as seckertary,” said Erastus Winch, beaming broadly upon the minister, as if the mere mention of the fact promoted jollity. “That’s it, Brother Gorringe; take your seat at Brother Ware’s

desk. Mind the dominie's pen don't play tricks on you, an' start off writin' out sermons instid of figgers." The humorist turned to Theron as the lawyer walked over to the desk at the window. "I allus have to caution him about that," he remarked, with great joviality. "An' do *you* look out afterwards, Brother Ware, or else you'll catch that pen o' yours scribblin' lawyer's lingo in place o' the Word."

Theron felt bound to exhibit a grin in acknowledgment of this pleasantry. The lawyer's change of position had involved some shifting of the others' chairs, and the young minister found himself directly confronted by Brother Pierce's hard and colourless old visage. Its little eyes were watching him as through a mask, and under their influence the smile of politeness fled from his lips. The lawyer on his right, the cheese-buyer on his left, seemed to recede into distance as he for the moment returned the gaze of the quarryman. He waited now for him to speak, as if the others were of no importance.

"We are a plain sort o' folks up in these parts," said Brother Pierce after a slight further pause. His voice was as dry and rasping as his cough, and its intonations were those of authority. "We walk here," he went on, eyeing the minister with a sour regard, "in a meek an' humble spirit, in the strait an' narrow way which leadeth unto life. We ain't gone traipsin' after strange gods,

like some people that call themselves Methodists in other places. We stick by the Discipline an' the ways of our Fathers in Israel. No new-fangled notions can go down here. Your wife'd better take them flowers out of her bunnit afore next Sunday."

Silence possessed the room for a few moments, the while Theron, pale-faced and with brows knit, studied the pattern of the ingrain carpet. Then he lifted his head and nodded it in assent. "Yes," he said; "we will do nothing by which our 'brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.'"

Brother Pierce's parchment face showed no sign of surprise or pleasure at this easy submission. "Another thing. We don't want no book-learnin' or dictionary words in our pulpit," he went on coldly. "Some folks may stomach 'em; we won't. Them two sermons o' yours—p'raps they'd do down in some city place, but they're like your wife's bunnit here—they're too flowery to suit us. What we want to hear is the plain, old-fashioned Word of God, without any palaver or 'hems and ha's. They tell me there's some parts where hell's treated as played out—where our ministers don't like to talk much about it, because people don't want to hear about it. Such preachers ought to be put out. They ain't Methodists at all. What we want here, sir, is straight-out, flat-footed hell—the burnin' lake o' fire and brimstone. Pour it into 'em, hot an' strong. We

can't have too much of it. Work in them awful death-beds of Voltaire an' Tom Paine, with the devil right there in the room reachin' for 'em, an' they yellin' for fright—that's what fills the anxious seat an' brings in souls hand over fist!"

Theron's tongue dallied for an instant with the temptation to comment upon these old-wife fables, which were so dear to the rural religious heart when he and I were boys; but it seemed wiser to only nod again and let his mentor go on.

"We ain't had no trouble with the Free Methodists here," continued Brother Pierce, "jest because we kept to the old paths, an' seek for salvation in the good old way. Everybody can shout 'Amen!' as loud and as long as the spirit moves him with us. Someone was sayin' you thought we ought to have a choir and an organ. No, sirree! No such tomfoolery for us! You'll only stir up feelin' agin yourself by hintin' at such things. And then, too, our folks don't take no stock in all that pack o' nonsense about science, such as tellin' the age of the earth by crackin' up stones. I've been in the quarry line all my life, an' I know it's all humbug. Why, they say some folks are goin' round now preachin' that our grandfathers were all monkeys. That comes from departin' from the ways of our forefathers, an' puttin' in organs and choirs, an' deckin' our women-folks out with gewgaws, an' apin' the fashions of the worldly.

I shouldn't wonder if them kind did have some monkey blood in 'em. You'll find we're a different sort here."

The young minister preserved silence for a little, until it became apparent that the old trustee had had his say out. Even then he raised his head slowly, and at last made answer in a hesitating and irresolute way.

"You have been very frank," he said. "I am obliged to you. A clergyman coming to a new charge cannot be better served than by having laid before him a clear statement of the views and—and spiritual tendencies—of his new flock quite at the outset. I feel it to be of especial value in this case, because I am young in years and in my ministry, and am conscious of a great weakness of the flesh. I can see how daily contact with a people so attached to the old, simple, primitive Methodism of Wesley and Asbury may be a source of much strength to me. I may take it," he added upon second thought, with an inquiring glance at Mr. Winch, "that Brother Pierce's description of our charge, and its tastes and needs, meets with your approval?"

Erastus Winch nodded his head and smiled expansively. "Whatever Brother Pierce says, goes," he declared. The lawyer, sitting behind at the desk by the window, said nothing.

"The place is jest overrun with Irish," Brother Pierce began again. "They've got two Catholic churches here

now to our one, and they do jest as they blamed please at the Charter elections. It 'd be a good idee to pitch into Catholics in general whenever you can. You could make a hit that way. I say the State ought to make 'em pay taxes on their church property. They've no right to be exempted, because they ain't Christians at all. They're idolaters, that's what they are! I know 'em! I've had 'em in my quarries for years, an' they ain't got no idee of decency or fair dealin'. Every time the price of stone went up, every man of 'em would jine to screw more wages out o' me. Why, they used to keep account o' the amount o' business I done, an' figger up my profits, an' have the face to come an' talk to me about 'em, as if that had anything to do with wages. It's my belief their priests put 'em up to it. People don't begin to reelise—that Church of idolatry 'll be the ruin o' this country if it ain't checked in time. Jest you go at 'em, hammer 'n' tongs! I've got Eytalians in the quarries now; they're sensible fellows; they know when they're well off—a dollar a day an' they're satisfied, an' everything goes smooth."

"But they're Catholics, the same as the Irish," suddenly interjected the lawyer from his place by the window. Theron pricked up his ears at the sound of his voice. There was an anti-Pierce note in it, so to speak, which it did him good to hear. The conscious-

ness of sympathy began on the instant to inspire him with courage.

"I know some people *say* they are," Brother Pierce guardedly retorted; "but I've summered an' wintered both kinds, an' *I* hold to it they're different. I grant ye, the Eyetalians *are* some given to jabbin' knives into each other, but they never git up strikes, an' they don't grumble about wages. Why, look at the way they live—jest some weeds an' yarbs dug up on the roadside, an' stewed in a kettle with a piece o' fat the size o' your finger, an' a loaf o' bread, an' they're happy as a king. There's some sense in *that*; but the Irish, they've got to have meat an' potatoes an' butter, jest as if—as if——"

"As if they'd be'n used to 'em at home," put in Mr. Winch, to help his colleague out.

The lawyer ostentatiously drew up his chair to the desk, and began turning over the leaves of his biggest book. "It's getting on towards noon, gentlemen," he said, in an impatient voice.

The business meeting which followed was for a considerable time confined to hearing extracts from the books and papers, read in a swift and formal fashion by Mr. Gorringe. If this was intended to inform the new pastor of the exact financial situation in Octavius, it lamentably failed of its purpose. Theron had little knowledge of figures, and though he tried hard to listen,

and to assume an air of comprehension, he did not understand much of what he heard. In a general way he gathered that the church property was put down at \$12,000, on which there was a debt of \$4800. The annual expenses were \$2250, of which the principal items were \$800 for his salary, \$170 for the rent of the parsonage, and \$319 for interest on the debt. It seemed that last year the receipts had fallen just under \$2000, and they now confronted the necessity of making good this deficit during the coming year, as well as increasing the regular revenues. Without much discussion, it was agreed that they should endeavour to secure the services of a celebrated "debt-raiser" early in the autumn, and utilise him in the closing days of a revival.

Theron knew one "debt-raiser," and had seen him at work—a burly, bustling, vulgar man, who took possession of the pulpit as if it were an auctioneer's block, and pursued the task of exciting liberality in the bosoms of the congregation by alternating prayer, anecdote, song, and cheap buffoonery in a manner truly sickening. Would it not be preferable, he feebly suggested, to raise the money by a festival, or fair, or some other form of entertainment which the ladies could manage?

Brother Pierce shook his head with contemptuous emphasis. "Our women folks ain't that kind," he said. "They did try to hold a sociable once, but nobody

came, and we didn't raise more'n three or four dollars. It ain't their line. They lack the worldly arts. As the Discipline commands, they avoid the evil of putting on gold and costly apparel, and taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus."

"Well—of course—if you prefer the 'debt-raiser'——" Theron began, and took the itemised account from Gorringer's knee as an excuse for not finishing the hateful sentence.

He looked down the foolscap sheet, line by line, with no special sense of what it signified, until his eye caught upon this little section of the report, bracketed by itself, in the secretary's neat hand:—

INTEREST CHARGE.			
{	First mortgage (1873) . . .	\$1000 (E. Winch @ 7 . . .	\$70
	Second mortgage (1876) . .	1700 (L. Gorringer) @ 6 . .	102
	Third mortgage (1878) . . .	2100 (L. Pierce) @ 7 . . .	147
		<u>\$4800</u>	<u>\$319</u>

It was no news to him that the three mortgages on the church property were held by the three trustees. But as he looked once more, another feature of the thing struck him as curious.

"I notice that the rates of interest vary," he remarked without thinking, and then wished the words unsaid, for the two trustees in view moved uneasily on their seats.

"Oh, that's nothing," exclaimed Erastus Winch, with a boisterous display of jollity. "It's only Brother Gorringer's pleasant little way of making a contribution to our funds. You will notice that at the date of all these mortgages the State rate of interest was seven per cent. Since then it's been lowered to six. Well, when that happened, you see, Brother Gorringer, not being a professin' member, and so not bound by our rules, he could just as well as not let his interest down a cent. But Brother Pierce an' me, we talked it over, an' we made up our minds we were tied hand an' foot by our contract. You know how strong the Discipline lays it down that we must be bound to the letter of our agreements. That bein' so, we seen it in the light of duty not to change what we'd set our hands to. That's how it is, Brother Ware."

"I understand," said Theron, with an effort at polite calmness of tone. "And—is there anything else?"

"There's this," broke in Brother Pierce; "we're commanded to be law-abiding people, an' seven per cent. *was* the law—an' would be now if them ragamuffins in the Legislature——"

"Surely we needn't go further into that," interrupted the minister, conscious of a growing stiffness in his moral spine. "Have we any other business before us?"

Brother Pierce's little eyes snapped and the wrinkles in his forehead deepened angrily. "Business?" he de-

manded. "Yes, plenty of it. We've got to reduce expenses. "We're nigh on to \$300 behindhand this minute. Beside your house-rent, you get \$800 free an' clear—that is \$15.38 every week, an' only you an' your wife to keep out of it. Why, when I was your age, young man, and after that too, I was glad to get \$4 a week."

"I don't think my salary is under discussion, Mr. Pierce——"

"*Brother* Pierce," suggested Winch, in a half-chuckling undertone.

"Brother Pierce, then," echoed Theron impatiently. "The Quarterly Conference and the Estimating Committee deal with that. The trustees have no more to do with it than the man in the moon."

"Come, come, Brother Ware," put in Erastus Winch, "we musn't have no hard feelin's. Brotherly love is what we're all lookin' after. Brother Pierce's meanin' wasn't agin your drawin' your full salary, every cent of it; only—only there are certain little things, connected with the parsonage here, that we feel you ought to bear. F'r instance, there's the new side-walk we had to lay in front of the house here, only a month ago. Of course, if the treasury was flush we wouldn't say a word about it. An' then there's the gas bill, here. Seein' as you get your rent for nothin', it don't seem much to ask that you should see to lightin' the place yourself."

"No, I don't think that either is a proper charge upon me," interposed Theron. "I decline to pay them."

"We can have the gas shut off," remarked Brother Pierce coldly.

"As soon as you like," responded the minister, sitting erect and tapping the carpet nervously with his foot. "Only, you must understand that I will take the whole matter to the Quarterly Conference in July. I already see a good many other interesting questions about the financial management of this church which might be appropriately discussed there."

"Oh, come, Brother Ware!" broke in Trustee Winch, with a somewhat agitated assumption of good feeling. "Surely these are matters we ought to settle amongst ourselves. We never yet asked outsiders to meddle with our business here. It's our motto, Brother Ware. I say, if you've got a motto, stand by it."

"Well, my motto," said Theron, "is to be behaved decently to by those with whom I have to deal, and I also propose to stand by it."

Brother Pierce rose gingerly to his feet, with the hesitation of an old man not sure about his knees. When he had straightened himself he put on his hat and eyed the minister sternly from beneath its brim.

"The Lord gives us crosses grievous to our natur'," he said, "an' we're told to bear 'em cheerfully as long as they're on our backs, but there ain't nothin' said

agin our unloadin' 'em in the ditch the minute we git the chance. I guess you won't last here more'n a twelve-month."

He pulled his soft and discoloured old hat down over his brows, with a significantly hostile nod, and turning, stumped toward the hall door without offering to shake hands.

The other trustees had risen likewise, in tacit recognition that the meeting was over. Winch clasped the minister's hand in his own broad, hard palm, and squeezed it in an exuberant grip. "Don't mind his little ways, Brother Ware," he urged in a loud, unctuous whisper, with a grinning backward nod; "he's a trifle skittish sometimes, when you don't give him free rein; but he's all wool an' a yard wide when it comes to right-down hard-pan religion. My love to Sister Ware," and he followed the senior trustee into the hall.

Mr. Gorringe had been tying up his books and papers. He came now with the bulky parcel under his arm, and his hat and stick in the other hand. He could give little but his thumb to Theron to shake. His face wore a grave expression, and not a line relaxed as, catching the minister's look, he slowly covered his left eye in a deliberate wink.

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"Well, and how did it go off?" asked Alice, from where she knelt by the oven door, a few minutes later.

For answer Theron threw himself wearily into the big old farm rocking-chair on the other side of the stove, and shook his head with a lengthened sigh.

“If it wasn’t for that man Gorringer of yours,” he said dejectedly, “I think *I* should feel like going off—and learning a trade.”

CHAPTER IV.

ON the following Sunday young Mrs. Ware sat alone in the preacher's pew through the morning service, and everybody noted that the roses had been taken from her bonnet. In the evening she was absent, and after the Doxology and Benediction several people, under the pretence of solicitude for her health, tried to pump her husband as to the reason. He answered their inquiries civilly enough, but with brevity: she had stayed at home because she did not feel like coming out—this and nothing more.

The congregation dispersed under a gossip-laden cloud of consciousness that there must be something queer about Sister Ware. There was a tolerably general agreement, however, that the two sermons of the day had been excellent. Not even Loren Pierce's railing commentary on the pastor's introduction of an outlandish word like "epitome"—clearly forbidden by the Discipline's injunction to plain language understood of the people—availed to sap the satisfaction of the majority.

Theron himself comprehended that he had pleased the bulk of his auditors; the knowledge left him curi-

ously hot and cold. On the one hand there was joy in the apparent prospect that the congregation would back him up in a stand against the trustees, if worst came to worst. But on the other, the bonnet episode entered his soul. It had been a source of bitter humiliation to him to see his wife sitting there beneath the pulpit, shorn, by despotic order, of the adornments natural to her pretty head. But he had even greater pain in contemplating the effect it had produced upon Alice herself. She had said not a word on the subject, but her every glance and gesture seemed to him eloquent of deep feeling about it. He made sure that she blamed him for having defended his own gas and side-walk rights with successful vigour, but permitted the sacrifice of her poor little inoffensive roses without a protest. In this view of the matter, indeed, he blamed himself. Was it too late to make the error good? He ventured a hint on this Sunday evening, when he returned to the parsonage and found her reading an old weekly newspaper by the light of the kitchen lamp, to the effect that he fancied there would be no great danger in putting those roses back into her bonnet. Without lifting her eyes from the paper, she answered that she had no earthly desire to wear roses in her bonnet, and went on with her reading.

At breakfast next morning Theron found himself in command of an unusual fund of humorous good spirits,

and was at pains to make the most of it, passing whimsical comments on subjects which the opening day suggested, recalling quaint and comical memories of the past, and striving his best to force Alice into a laugh. Formerly her merry temper had always ignited at the merest spark of gaiety; now she gave his jokes only a dutiful half-smile, and uttered scarcely a word in response to his running fire of talk. When the meal was finished she went silently to work to clear away the dishes.

Theron turned over in his mind the project of offering to help her, as he had done so often in those dear old days when they laughingly began life together. Something decided this project in the negative for him, and after a few lingering moments he put on his hat and went out for a walk.

Not even the most doleful and trying hour of his bitter experience in Tyre had depressed him like this. Looking back upon those past troubles, he persuaded himself that he had borne them all with a light and cheerful heart, simply because Alice had been one with him in every thought and emotion. How perfect, how ideally complete, their sympathy had always been! With what absolute unity of mind and soul they had trod that difficult path together! And now—henceforth—was it to be different? The mere suggestion of such a thing chilled his veins. He said aloud to himself as he

walked that life would be an intolerable curse if Alice were to cease sharing it with him in every conceivable phase.

He had made his way out of the town, and tramped along the country hill-road for a considerable distance, before a merciful light began to lessen the shadows in the picture of gloom with which his mind tortured itself. All at once he stopped short, lifted his head, and looked about him. The broad valley lay warm and tranquil in the May sunshine at his feet. In the thicket up the hill-side above him a grey squirrel was chattering shrilly, and the birds sang in tireless choral confusion. Theron smiled, and drew a long breath. The gay clamour of the woodland songsters, the placid radiance of the landscape, were suddenly taken in and made a part of his new mood. He listened, smiled once more, and then started in a leisurely way back toward Octavius.

How could he have been so ridiculous as to fancy that Alice—his Alice—had been changed into someone else? He marvelled now at his own perverse folly. She was overworked—tired out—that was all. The task of moving in, of setting the new household to rights, had been too much for her. She must have a rest. They must get in a hired girl.

Once this decision about a servant fixed itself in the young minister's mind, it drove out the last vestige of discomfort. He strode along now in great content,

revolving idly a dozen different plans for gilding and beautifying this new life of leisure into which his sanguine thoughts projected Alice. One of these particularly pleased him, and waxed in definiteness as he turned it over and over. He would get another piano for her, in place of that which had been sacrificed in Tyre. That beneficent modern invention, the instalment plan, made this quite feasible—so easy, in fact, that it almost seemed as if he should find his wife playing on the new instrument when he got home. He would step in at the music store and see about it that very day.

Of course, now that these important resolutions had been taken, it would be a good thing if he could do something to bring in some extra money. This was by no means a new notion. He had mused over the possibility in a formless way ever since that memorable discovery of indebtedness in Tyre, and had long ago recognised the hopelessness of endeavour in every channel save that of literature. Latterly his fancy had been stimulated by reading an account of the profits which Canon Farrar had derived from his "Life of Christ." If such a book could command such a bewildering multitude of readers, Theron felt that there ought to be a chance for him. So clear did constant rumination render this assumption, that the young pastor in time had come to regard this prospective book of his as a

substantial asset, which could be realised without trouble whenever he got around to it.

He had not, it is true, gone to the length of seriously considering what should be the subject of his book. That had not seemed to him to matter much, so long as it was Scriptural. Familiarity with the process of extracting a fixed amount of spiritual and intellectual meat from any casual text, week after week, had given him an idea that any one of many subjects would do, when the time came for him to make a choice. He realised now that the time for a selection had arrived, and almost simultaneously found himself with a ready-made decision in his mind. The book should be about Abraham!

Theron Ware was extremely interested in the mechanism of his own brain, and followed its workings with a lively curiosity. Nothing could be more remarkable, he thought, than to thus discover that, on the instant of his formulating a desire to know what he should write upon, lo and behold! there his mind, quite on its own initiative, had the answer waiting for him! When he had gone a little further, and the powerful range of possibilities in the son's revolt against the idolatry of his father the image-maker, in the exodus from the unholy city of Ur, and in the influence of the new nomadic life upon the little deistic family group, had begun to unfold itself before him, he felt that the

hand of Providence was plainly discernible in the matter. The book was to be blessed from its very inception.

Walking homeward briskly now, with his eyes on the sidewalk and his mind all aglow with crowding suggestions for the new work and impatience to be at it, he came abruptly upon a group of men and boys who occupied the whole path, and were moving forward so noiselessly that he had not heard them coming. He almost ran into the leader of this little procession, and began a stammering apology, the final words of which were left unspoken, so solemnly heedless of him and his talk were all the faces he saw.

In the centre of the group were four working men, bearing between them an extemporised litter of two poles and a blanket hastily secured across them with spikes. Most of what this litter held was covered by another blanket, rounded in coarse folds over a shapeless bulk. From beneath its farther end protruded a big broom-like black beard, thrown upward at such an angle as to hide everything beyond to those in front. The tall young minister, stepping aside and standing on tiptoe, could see sloping downward behind this hedge of beard a pinched and chalk-like face, with wide-open, staring eyes. Its lips, of a dull lilac hue, were moving ceaselessly, and made a dry, clicking sound.

Theron instinctively joined himself to those who followed the litter—a motley dozen of street idlers,

chiefly boys. One of these in whispers explained to him that the man was one of Jerry Madden's workmen in the waggon-shops, who had been deployed to trim an elm-tree in front of his employer's house, and being unused to such work, had fallen from the top and broken all his bones. They would have cared for him at Madden's house, but he had insisted upon being taken home. His name was MacEvoy, and he was Joey MacEvoy's father, and likewise Jim's and Hughey's and Martin's. After a pause the lad, a bright-eyed, freckled, barefooted wee Irishman, volunteered the further information that his big brother had run to bring "Father Forbess," on the chance that he might be in time to administer "extry munction."

The way of the silent little procession led through back streets—where women hanging up clothes in the yards hurried to the gates, their aprons full of clothespins, to stare open-mouthed at the passers-by—and came to a halt at last in an irregular and muddy lane, before one of a half-dozen shanties reared among the ash-heaps and rubbish of the town's most bedraggled outskirts.

A stout, middle-aged^l, red-armed woman, already warned by some messenger of calamity, stood waiting on the roadside bank. There were whimpering children clinging to her skirts, and a surrounding cluster of women of the neighbourhood, some of the more elderly

of whom, shrivelled little crones in tidy caps, and with their aprons to their eyes, were beginning in a low murmured minor the wail which presently should rise into the keen of death. Mrs. MacEvoy herself made no moan, and her broad ruddy face was stern in expression, rather than sorrowful. When the litter stopped beside her, she laid a hand for an instant on her husband's wet brow, and looked—one could have sworn impassively—into his staring eyes. Then, still without a word, she waved the bearers towards the door, and led the way herself.

Theron, somewhat wonderingly, found himself a minute later inside a dark and ill-smelling room, the air of which was humid with the steam from a boiler of clothes on the stove, and not in other ways improved by the presence of a jostling score of women, all straining their gaze upon the open door of the only other apartment—the bed-chamber. Through this they could see the workmen laying MacEvoy on the bed, and standing awkwardly about thereafter, getting in the way of the wife and old Maggie Quirk as these strove to remove the garments from his crushed limbs. As the neighbours watched what could be seen of these proceedings, they whispered among themselves eulogies of the injured man's industry and good temper, his habit of bringing his money home to his wife, and the way he kept his Father Mathew pledge and attended to his

religious duties. They admitted freely that, by the light of his example, their own husbands and sons left much to be desired, and from this wandered easily off into domestic digressions of their own. But all the while their eyes were bent upon the bedroom door, and Theron made out, after he had grown accustomed to the gloom and the smell, that many of them were telling their beads, even while they kept the muttered conversation alive. None of them paid any attention to him, or seemed to regard his presence there as unusual.

Presently he saw enter through the sunlit street doorway a person of a different class. The bright light shone for a passing instant upon a fashionable flowered hat, and upon some remarkably brilliant shade of red hair beneath it. In another moment there had edged along through the throng, to almost within touch of him, a tall young woman, the owner of this hat and wonderful hair. She was clad in light and pleasing spring attire, and carried a parasol with a long oxidised silver handle of a quaint pattern. She looked at him, and he saw that her face was of a lengthened oval, with a luminous rosetinted skin, full red lips, and big, brown, frank eyes, with heavy auburn lashes. She made a grave little inclination of her head toward him, and he bowed in response. Since her arrival, he noted, the chattering of the others had entirely ceased.

"I followed the others in in the hope that I might be of some assistance," he ventured to explain to her in a low murmur, feeling that at last here was some one to whom an explanation of his presence in this Romish house was due. "I hope they won't feel that I have intruded."

She nodded her head, as if she quite understood. "They'll take the will for the deed," she whispered back. "Father Forbes will be here in a minute. Do you know?—is it too late?"

Even as she spoke the outer doorway was darkened by the commanding bulk of a new-comer's figure. The flash of a silk hat and the deferential haste in which the assembled neighbours fell back to clear a passage made his identity clear. Theron felt his blood tingle in an unaccustomed way as this priest of a strange Church advanced across the room—a broad-shouldered, portly man of more than middle height, with a shapely, strong-lined face of almost waxen pallor, and a firm, commanding tread. He carried in his hands, beside his hat, a small leather-bound case. To this, and to him, the women curtsied and bowed their heads as he passed.

"Come with me," whispered the tall girl with the parasol to Theron, and he found himself pushing along in her wake until they intercepted the priest just outside the bedroom door. She touched Father Forbes on the arm.

"Just to tell you that I am here," she said. The priest nodded with a grave face, and passed into the other room. In a minute or two the workmen, Mrs. MacEvoy, and her helper came out, and the door was shut behind them.

"He is making his confession," explained the young lady. "Stay here for a minute."

She moved over to where the woman of the house stood, glum-faced and tearless, and whispered something to her. A confused movement among the crowd followed, and out of it presently resulted a small table, covered with a white cloth, and bearing on it two unlighted candles, a basin of water, and a spoon, which was brought forward and placed in readiness before the closed door. Some of those nearest this cleared space were kneeling now, and murmuring a low buzz of prayer to the click of beads on their rosaries.

The door opened, and Theron saw the priest standing in the doorway with an uplifted hand. He wore now a surplice, with a purple band over his shoulders, and on his pale face there shone a tranquil and tender light.

One of the workmen fetched from the stove a brand, lighted the two candles, and bore the table with its contents into the bedroom. The young woman plucked Theron's sleeve, and he dumbly followed her into the chamber of death, making one of the foremost group of

a dozen, headed by Mrs. MacEvoy and her children, which filled the little room, and with difficulty held back the pushing throng outside. He found himself bowing with the others to receive the sprinkled holy water from the priest's white fingers; kneeling with the others for the prayers; following in impressed silence with the others the strange ceremonial by which the priest traced crosses of holy oil with his thumb upon the eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, hands, and feet of the dying man, wiping off the oil with a piece of cotton-wool each time after he had repeated the invocation to forgiveness for that particular sense. But most of all he was moved by the rich, novel sound of the Latin, as the priest rolled it forth in the *Asperges me, Domine*, and *Misereatur vestri omnipotens Deus*, with its soft Continental vowels and liquid r's. It seemed to him that he had never really heard Latin before. Then the astonishing young woman with the red hair declaimed the *Confiteor* vigorously and with a resonant distinctness of enunciation. It was a different Latin, harsher and more sonorous, and while it still dominated the murmured undertone of the others' prayers the last moment came.

Theron had stood face to face with death at many other bedsides: no other final scene had stirred him like this. It must have been the girl's Latin chant, with its clanging reiteration of the great names—"Beatum Michaellem Archangelum, beatum Joannem Baptistam,

sanctos, Apostolos Petrum et Paulum”—invoked with such proud confidence in this squalid little shanty, which so strangely affected him.

He came out with the others at last—the candles and the folded hands over the crucifix left behind—and walked as one in a dream. Even by the time that he had gained the outer doorway, and stood blinking at the bright light and filling his lungs with honest air once more, it had begun to seem incredible to him that he had seen and done all this.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE Mr. Ware stood thus on the doorstep, through a minute of formless musing, the priest and the girl came out, and, somewhat to his confusion, made him one of their party. He felt himself flushing under the idea that they would think he had waited for them—was thrusting himself upon them. The notion prompted him to bow frigidly in response to Father Forbes' pleasant "I am glad to meet you, sir," and his outstretched hand.

"I dropped in by the—the merest accident," Theron said. "I met them bringing the poor man home, and—and quite without thinking, I obeyed the impulse to follow them in, and didn't realise——"

He stopped short, annoyed by the reflection that this was his second apology. The girl smiled placidly at him the while she put up her parasol.

"It did me good to see you there," she said, quite as if she had known him all her life. "And so it did the rest of us."

Father Forbes permitted himself a soft little chuckle, approving rather than mirthful, and patted her on the

shoulder with the air of being fifty years her senior instead of fifteen. To the minister's relief he changed the subject, as the three started together toward the road.

"There again no doctor was sent for!" he exclaimed, as if resuming a familiar subject with the girl. Then he turned to Theron. "I dare say you have no such trouble, but with our poorer people it is very vexing. They will *not* call in a physician, but hurry off first for the clergyman. I don't know that it is altogether to avoid doctors' bills, but it amounts to that in effect. Of course, in this case it made no difference, but I have had to make it a rule not to go out at night unless they bring me a physician's card with his assurance that it is a genuine affair. Why, only last winter I was routed up after midnight, and brought off in the mud and pelt-ing rain up one of the new streets on the hill-side there, simply because a factory-girl who was laced too tight had fainted at a dance. I slipped and fell into a puddle in the darkness, ruined a new overcoat, and got drenched to the skin; and when I arrived the girl had recovered, and was dancing away again, thirteen to the dozen. It was then that I made the rule. I hope, Mr. Ware, that Octavius is producing a pleasant impression upon you so far?"

"I scarcely know yet," answered Theron. The genial talk of the priest, with its whimsical anecdote, had in truth passed over his head. His mind still had room

for nothing but that novel deathbed scene, with the winged Captain of the angelic host, the Baptist, the glorified Fisherman, and the Preacher all being summoned down in the pomp of liturgical Latin to help MacEvoy to die. "If you don't mind my saying so," he added hesitatingly, "what I have just seen in there *did* make a very powerful impression upon me."

"It is a very ancient ceremony," said the priest; "probably Persian, like the baptismal form; although, for that matter, we can never dig deep enough for the roots of these things. They all turn up Turanian if we probe far enough. Our ways separate here, I'm afraid. I am delighted to have made your acquaintance, Mr. Ware. Pray look in upon me—if you can as well as not. We are near neighbours, you know."

Father Forbes had shaken hands and moved off up another street some distance before the voice of the girl recalled Theron to himself.

"Of course you knew *him* by name," she was saying, "and he knew *you* by sight, and had talked of you, but *my* poor inferior sex has to be introduced. I am Celia Madden. My father has the waggon-shops, and I—I play the organ at the church.

"I—I am delighted to make your acquaintance," said Theron, conscious as he spoke that he had slavishly echoed the formula of the priest. He could think of

nothing better to add than, "Unfortunately, we have no organ in our church."

The girl laughed as they resumed their walk down the street. "I'm afraid I couldn't undertake two," she said, and laughed again. Then she spoke more seriously. "That ceremony must have interested you a good deal, never having seen it before. I saw that it was all new to you, and so I made bold to take you under my wing, so to speak."

"You were very kind," said the young minister. "It was really a great experience for me. May—may I ask—is it a part of your functions—in the church, I mean—to attend these last rites?"

"Mercy, no!" replied the girl, spinning the parasol on her shoulder and smiling at the thought. "No; it was only because MacEvoy was one of our workmen, and really came by his death through father sending him up to trim a tree. Ann MacEvoy will never forgive us that the longest day she lives. Did you notice her? She wouldn't speak to me. After you came out I tried to tell her that we would look out for her and the children, but all she would say to me was, 'An' fwat would a wheelwright, an' him the father of a family, be doin' up a tree?'"

They had come now upon the main street of the village, with its flagstone sidewalk overhung by a lofty canopy of elm-boughs. Here, for the space of some

blocks, was concentrated such fashionable elegance of mansions and ornamental lawns as Octavius had to offer, and it was presented with the irregularity so characteristic of our restless civilisation. Two or three of the houses survived untouched from the earlier days—prim, decorous structures—each with its gabled centre and lower wings, each with its row of fluted columns supporting the classical roof of a piazza across its whole front, each vying with the others in the whiteness of those wooden walls enveloping its bright green blinds. One had to look over picket-fences to see these houses, and in doing so caught the notion that they thus railed themselves off in pride at being able to remember before the railroad came to the village or the waggon-works were thought of.

Before the neighbouring properties the fences had been swept away, so that one might stroll from the sidewalk straight across the well-trimmed sward to any one of a dozen elaborately modern doorways. Some of the residences thus frankly proffering familiarity to the passer-by were of wood, painted in drabs and dusky reds, with bulging windows which marked the native yearning for the mediæval, and shingles that strove to be accounted tiles. Others—a prouder, less pretentious sort—were of brick or stone, with terra-cotta mouldings set into the walls, and with real slates covering the riot of turrets and peaks and dormer peepholes overhead.

Celia Madden stopped in front of the largest and

most important-looking of these new edifices, and said, holding out her hand, "Here I am once more. Good morning, Mr. Ware."

Theron hoped that his manner did not betray the flash of surprise he felt in discovering that his new acquaintance lived in the biggest house in Octavius. He remembered now that someone had pointed it out as the abode of the owner of the waggon factories, but it had not occurred to him before to associate this girl with that village magnate. It was stupid of him, of course, because she had herself mentioned her father. He looked at her again, with an awkward smile, as he formally shook the gloved hand she gave him, and lifted his soft hat. The strong noon sunlight, forcing its way down between the elms and beating upon her parasol of lace-edged creamy silk, made a halo about her hair and face at once brilliant and tender. He had not seen before how beautiful she was. She nodded in recognition of his salute, and moved up the lawn walk, spinning the sunshade on her shoulder.

Though the parsonage was only three blocks away, the young minister had time to think about a good many things before he reached home.

First of all he had to revise in part the arrangement of his notions about the Irish. Save for an occasional isolated and taciturn figure among the nomadic portion of the hired help in the farm country, Theron had

scarcely ever spoken to a person of this curiously alien race before. He remembered now that there had been some dozen or more Irish families in Tyre, quartered in the outskirts, among the brickyards, but he had never come in contact with any of them, or given to their existence even a passing thought. So far as personal acquaintance went, the Irish had been to him only a name.

But what a sinister and repellent name! His views on this general subject were merely those common to his communion and his environment. He took it for granted, for example, that in the large cities most of the poverty, and all the drunkenness, crime, and political corruption, were due to the perverse qualities of this foreign people—qualities accentuated and emphasised in every evil direction by the baleful influence of a false and idolatrous religion. It is hardly too much to say that he had never encountered a dissenting opinion on this point. His boyhood had been spent in those bitter days when social, political, and blood prejudices were fused at white-heat together in the crucible of War. When he went to the Church Seminary, it was a matter of course that every member of the faculty was a Republican, and that every one of his class-mates had come from a Republican household. When, later on, he entered the ministry, the rule was still incredulous of exceptions. One might as well have looked in the

Nedahma Conference for a divergence of opinion on the Trinity as for a difference in political conviction. Indeed, even among the laity, Theron could not feel sure that he had ever known a Democrat; that is, at all closely. He understood very little about politics, it is true. If he had been driven into a corner, and forced to attempt an explanation of this tremendous partisan unanimity in which he had a share, he would probably have first mentioned the War, the last shots of which were fired while he was still in petticoats. Certainly his second reason, however, would have been that the Irish were on the other side.

He had never before had occasion to formulate, even in his own thoughts, this tacit race and religious aversion in which he had been bred. It rose now suddenly in front of him, as he sauntered from patch to patch of sunlight under the elms, like some huge shadowy and symbolical monument. He looked at it with wondering curiosity, as at something he had heard of all his life but never seen before. An abhorrent spectacle, truly! The foundations upon which its dark bulk reared itself were ignorance, squalor, brutality, and vice. Pigs wallowed in the mire before its base, and burrowing into this base were a myriad of narrow doors, each bearing the hateful sign of a saloon, and giving forth from its recesses of night the sounds of screams and curses. Above were sculptured rows of lowering, ape-like faces

from Nast's and Keppler's cartoons, and out of these sprang into the vague upper gloom—on the one side lamp-posts from which negroes hung by the neck, and on the other gibbets for dynamiters and Molly Maguires, and between the two glowed a spectral picture of some black-robed, tonsured men, with leering Satanic masks, making a bonfire of the Bible in the public schools.

Theron stared this phantasm hard in the face, and recognised it for a very tolerable embodiment of what he had heretofore supposed he thought about the Irish. For an instant the sight of it made him shiver, as if the sunny May had of a sudden lapsed into bleak December. Then he smiled, and the bad vision went off into space. He saw instead Father Forbes, in the white and purple vestments, standing by poor MacEvoy's bedside, with his pale, chiselled, luminous, uplifted face, and he heard only the proud, confident clanging of the girl's recital—*“Beatum Michaelem Archangelum, beatum Joannem Baptistam, Petrum et Paulum—em!—am!—um!”*—like strokes on a great resonant alarm-bell, attuned for the hearing of Heaven. He caught himself on the very verge of feeling that Heaven must have heard.

Then he smiled again, and laid the matter aside, with a parting admission that it had been undoubtedly picturesque and impressive, and that it had been a valuable experience to him to see it. At least the Irish, with all their faults, must have a poetic strain, or they

would not have clung so tenaciously to those curious and ancient forms. He recalled having heard somewhere, or read it might be, that they were a people much given to songs and music. And the young lady, that very handsome and friendly Miss Madden, had told him that she was a musician! He had a new pleasure in turning this over in his mind. Of all the closed doors which his choice of a career had left along his pathway, no other had for him such a magical fascination as that on which was graven the lute of Orpheus. He knew not even the alphabet of music, and his conceptions of its possibilities ran but little beyond the best of the hymn-singing he had heard at Conferences, yet none the less the longing for it raised on occasion such mutiny in his soul that more than once he had specifically prayed against it as a temptation.

Dangerous though some of its tendencies might be, there was no gainsaying the fact that a love for music was in the main an uplifting influence, an attribute of cultivation. The world was the sweeter and more gentle for it. And this brought him to musing upon the odd chance that the two people of Octavius who had given him the first notion of polish and intellectual culture in the town should be Irish. The Romish priest must have been vastly surprised at his intrusion, yet had been at the greatest pains to act as if it were quite the usual thing to have Methodist ministers assist at Extreme

Uction. And the young woman—how gracefully, with what delicacy, had she comprehended his position and robbed it of all its possible embarrassments! It occurred to him that they must have passed, there in front of her home, the very tree from which the luckless wheelwright had fallen some hours before, and the fact that she had forborne to point it out to him took form in his mind as an added proof of her refinement of nature.

The midday dinner was a little more than ready when Theron reached home, and let himself in by the front door. On Mondays, owing to the moisture and “clutter” of the weekly washing in the kitchen, the table was laid in the sitting-room, and as he entered from the hall the partner of his joys bustled in by the other door, bearing the steaming platter of corned beef, dumplings, cabbages and carrots, with arms bared to the elbows and a red face. It gave him great comfort, however, to note that there were no signs of the morning’s displeasure remaining on this face, and he immediately remembered again those interrupted projects of his about the piano and the hired girl.

“Well! I’d just about begun to reckon that I was a widow,” said Alice, putting down her fragrant burden. There was such an obvious suggestion of propitiation in her tone that Theron went around and kissed her. He thought of saying something about keeping out of the

way because it was "Blue Monday," but held it back lest it should sound like a reproach.

"Well, what kind of a washerwoman does *this* one turn out to be?" he asked, after they were seated and he had invoked a blessing, and was cutting vigorously into the meat.

"Oh, so-so," replied Alice; "she seems to be particular, but she's mortal slow. If I hadn't stood right over her we wouldn't have had the clothes out till goodness knows when. And of course she's Irish!"

"Well, what of *that*?" asked the minister, with a fine unconcern.

Alice looked up from her plate, with knife and fork suspended in air. "Why, you know we were talking only the other day of what a pity it was that none of our own people went out washing," she said. "That Welsh woman we heard of couldn't come, after all; and they say, too, that she presumes dreadfully upon the acquaintance, being a church member, you know. So we simply *had* to fall back on the Irish. And even if they do go and tell their priest everything they see and hear, why, there's one comfort, they can tell about *us* and welcome. Of course I see to it she doesn't snoop around in here."

Theron smiled. "That's all nonsense about their telling such things to their priests," he said, with easy confidence.

"Why, you told me so yourself," replied Alice briskly. "And I've always understood so, too; they're bound to tell *everything* in confession. That's what gives the Catholic Church such a tremendous hold. You've spoken of it often."

"It must have been by way of a figure of speech," remarked Theron, not with entire directness. "Women are great hands to separate one's observations from their context, and so give them meanings quite unintended. They are also great hands," he added genially, "or at least one of them is, at making the most delicious dumplings in the world. I believe these are the best even you ever made."

Alice was not unmindful of the compliment, but her thoughts were on other things. "I shouldn't like that woman's priest, for example," she said, "to know that we had no piano."

"But if he comes and stands outside our house every night and listens, as of course he will," said Theron, with much gravity, "it is only a question of time when he must reach that conclusion for himself. Our only chance, however, is that there are some twelve hundred other houses for him to watch, so that he may not get around to us for quite a spell. Why, seriously, Alice, what on earth do you suppose Father Forbes knows or cares about our poor little affairs, or those of any other Protestant household in this whole village?"

He has his work to do, just as I have mine; only his is ten times as exacting in everything except sermons, and you may be sure he is only too glad when it is over each day, without bothering about things that are none of his business."

"All the same, I'm afraid of them," said Alice, as if argument were exhausted.

CHAPTER VI.

ON the following morning young Mr. Ware anticipated events by inscribing in his diary for the day, immediately after breakfast, these remarks: "Arranged about piano. Began work upon book."

The date, indeed, deserved to be distinguished from its fellows. Theron was so conscious of its importance, that he not only prophesied in the little morocco-bound diary which Alice had given him for Christmas, but returned after he had got out upon the front steps of the parsonage to have his hat brushed afresh by her.

"Wonders will never cease," she said jocosely. "With you getting particular about your clothes, there isn't anything in this wide world that can't happen now."

"One doesn't go out to bring home a piano every day," he made answer. "Besides, I want to make such an impression upon the man that he will deal gently with that first cash payment down. Do you know," he added, watching her turn the felt brim under the wisp-broom's strokes, "I'm thinking some of getting me a regular silk stovepipe hat."

"Why don't you, then?" she rejoined, but without any ring of glad acquiescence in her tone. He fancied that her face lengthened a little, and he instantly ascribed it to recollections of the way in which the roses had been bullied out of her own headgear.

"You are quite sure now, pet," he made haste to change the subject, "that the hired girl can wait just as well as not until fall?"

"Oh *my*, yes!" Alice replied, putting the hat on his head and smoothing back his hair behind his ears. "She'd only be in the way now. You see, with hot weather coming on, there won't be much cooking. We'll just pick a bite here and there, and that saves so much work that really what remains is hardly more than taking care of a bird-cage. And, besides, not having her will almost half pay for the piano."

"But when cold weather comes you're sure you'll consent?" he urged.

"Like a shot!" she assured him; and after a happy little caress he started out again on his momentous mission.

"Thurston's" was a place concerning which opinions differed in Octavius. That it typified progress and helped more than any other feature of the village to bring it up to date no one, indeed, disputed. One might move about a great deal, in truth, and hear no other view expressed. But then, again, one

might stumble into conversation with one small store-keeper after another, and learn that they united in resenting the existence of "Thurston's," as rival farmers might join to curse a protracted drought. Each had his special flaming grievance. The little dry-goods dealers asked mournfully how they could be expected to compete with an establishment which could buy bankrupt stocks at a hundred different points and make a profit if only one-third of the articles were sold for more than they would cost from the jobber. The little boot and shoe dealers, clothiers, hatters, and furriers; the small merchants in carpets, crockery, and furniture; the vendors of hardware and household utensils, of leathern goods and picture-frames, of wall-paper, musical instruments, and even toys—all had the same pathetically unanswerable question to propound. But mostly they had to put it to themselves, because the others were at "Thurston's."

The Rev. Theron Ware had entertained rather strong views on this subject, and that only a week or two ago. One of his first acquaintances in Octavius had been the owner of the principal book-store in the place, a gentle and bald old man who produced the complete impression of a bibliophile upon what the slightest investigation showed to be only a meagre acquaintance with publishers' circulars. But at least he had the air of loving his business, and the young

minister had enjoyed a long talk with, or rather at, him. Out of this talk had come the information that the store was losing money. Not even the stationery department now showed a profit worth mentioning. When Octavius had contained only five thousand inhabitants it boasted four book-stores, two of them good ones. Now, with a population more than doubled, only these latter two survived, and they must soon go to the wall. The reasons? It was in a nutshell. A book which sold at retail for \$ 1.50 cost the bookseller, say, ninety cents. If it was at all a popular book, "Thurston's" advertised it at eighty-nine cents, and in any case at a profit of only two or three cents. Of course it was done to widen the establishment's patronage, to bring people into the store. Equally, of course, it was destroying the book business and debauching the reading tastes of the community. Without the profits from the light and ephemeral popular literature of the season the book-store proper could not keep up its stock of more solid works, and indeed could not long keep open at all. On the other hand, "Thurston's" dealt with nothing save the demand of the moment, and offered only the books which were the talk of the week. Thus, in plain words, the book trade was going to the dogs, and it was the same with pretty nearly every other trade.

Theron was indignant at this, and on his return home told Alice that he desired her to make no pur-

chases whatever at "Thurston's." He even resolved to preach a sermon on the subject of the modern idea of admiring the great for crushing the small, and sketched out some notes for it which he thought solved the problem of flaying the local abuse without mentioning it by name. They had lain on his desk now for ten days or more, and on only the previous Friday he had speculated upon using them that coming Sunday.

On this bright and cheerful Tuesday morning he walked with a blithe step unhesitatingly down the main street to "Thurston's," and entered without any show of repugnance the door next to the window wherein, flanked by dangling banjos and key-bugles built in pyramids, was displayed the sign, "Pianos on the Instalment Plan."

He was recognised by some responsible persons, and treated with distinguished deference. They were charmed with the intelligence that he desired a piano, and fascinated by his wish to pay for it only a little at a time. They had special terms for clergymen, and made him feel as if these were being extended to him by kneeling admirers on a silver charger.

It was so easy to buy things here that he was a trifle disturbed to find his flowing course interrupted by his own entire ignorance as to what kind of piano he wanted. He looked at all they had in stock, and heard them played upon. They differed greatly in price, and,

so he fancied, almost as much in tone. It discouraged him to note, however, that several of those he thought the finest in tone were among the very cheapest in the lot. Pondering this, and staring in hopeless puzzlement from one to another of the big black shiny monsters, he suddenly thought of something.

"I would rather not decide for myself," he said, "I know so little about it. If you don't mind, I will have a friend of mine, a skilled musician, step in and make a selection. I have so much confidence in—in *her* judgment." He added hurriedly, "It will involve only a day or two's delay."

The next moment he was sorry he had spoken. What would they think when they saw the organist of the Catholic church come to pick out a piano for the Methodist parsonage? And how could he decorously prefer the request to her to undertake this task? He might not meet her again for ages, and to his provincial notions writing would have seemed out of the question. And would it not be disagreeable to have her know that he was buying a piano by part payments? Poor Alice's dread of the washerwoman's gossip occurred to him at this, and he smiled in spite of himself. Then all at once the difficulty vanished. Of course it would come all right, somehow. Everything did.

He was on firmer ground buying the materials for the new book, over on the stationery side. His original

intention had been to bestow this patronage upon the old bookseller, but these suavely smart people in "Thurston's" had had the effect of putting him on his honour when they asked "would there be anything else?" and he had followed them unresistingly.

He indulged to the full his whim that everything entering into the construction of "Abraham" should be spick-and-span. He watched with his own eyes a whole ream of broad glazed white paper being sliced down by the cutter into single sheets, and thrilled with a novel ecstasy as he laid his hand upon the spotless bulk, so woingly did it invite him to begin. He tried a score of pens before the right one came to hand. When a box of these had been laid aside, with ink and penholders and a little bronze inkstand, he made a sign that the outfit was complete. Or no—there must be some blotting-paper. He had always used those blotting-pads given away by insurance companies—his congregations never failed to contain one or more agents, who had these to bestow by the armful—but the book deserved a virgin blotter.

Theron stood by while all these things were being tied up together in a parcel. The suggestion that they should be sent almost hurt him. Oh no, he would carry them home himself. So strongly did they appeal to his sanguine imagination that he could not forbear hinting to the man who had shown him the pianos and

was now accompanying him to the door, that this package under his arm represented potentially the price of the piano he was going to have. He did it in a roundabout way, with one of his droll, hesitating smiles. The man did not understand at all, and Theron had not the temerity to repeat the remark. He strode home with the precious bundle as fast as he could.

"I thought it best, after all, not to commit myself to a selection," he explained about the piano at dinner-time. "In such a matter as this the opinion of an expert is everything. I am going to have one of the principal musicians of the town go and try them all, and tell me which we ought to have."

"And while he's about it," said Alice, "you might ask him to make a little list of some of the new music. I've got away behind the times, being without a piano so long. Tell him not any *very* difficult pieces, you know."

"Yes, I know," put in Theron, almost hastily, and began talking of other things. His conversation was of the most rambling and desultory sort, because all the while the two lobes of his brain, as it were, kept up a dispute as to whether Alice ought to have been told that this "principal musician" was of her own sex. It would certainly have been better, at the outset, he decided, but to mention it now would be to invest the fact with undue importance. Yes, that was quite clear;

only the clearer it became, from one point of view, the shadier it waxed from the other. The problem really disturbed the young minister's mind throughout the meal, and his abstraction became so marked at last that his wife commented upon it.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said, with cheerful briskness. This ancient formula of the farm-land had always rather jarred on Theron. It presented itself now to his mind as a peculiarly aggravating banality.

"I am going to begin my book this afternoon," he remarked impressively. "There is a great deal to think about."

It turned out that there was even more to think about than he had imagined. After hours of solitary musing at his desk, or of pacing up and down before his open book-shelves, Theron found the first shadows of a May-day twilight beginning to fall upon that beautiful pile of white paper, still unstained by ink. He saw the book he wanted to write before him, in his mental vision, much more distinctly than ever, but the idea of beginning it impetuously, and hurling it off hot and glowing week by week, had faded away like a dream.

This long afternoon, spent face to face with a project born of his own brain but yesterday, yet already so much bigger than himself, was really a most fruitful time for the young clergyman. The lessons which cut most deeply into our consciousness are those we learn

from our children. Theron, in this first day's contact with the offspring of his fancy, found revealed to him an unsuspected and staggering truth. It was that he was an extremely ignorant and rudely untrained young man, whose pretensions to intellectual authority among any educated people would be laughed at with deserved contempt.

Strangely enough, after he had weathered the first shock, this discovery did not dismay Theron Ware. The very completeness of the conviction it carried with it saturated his mind with a feeling as if the fact had really been known to him all along. And there came, too, after a little, an almost pleasurable sense of the importance of the revelation. He had been merely drifting in fatuous and conceited blindness. Now all at once his eyes were open; he knew what he had to do. Ignorance was a thing to be remedied, and he would forthwith bend all his energies to cultivating his mind till it should blossom like a garden. In this mood Theron mentally measured himself against the more conspicuous of his colleagues in the Conference. They also were ignorant, clownishly ignorant: the difference was, that they were doomed by native incapacity to go on all their lives without ever finding it out. It was obvious to him that his case was better. There was bright promise in the very fact that he had discovered his shortcomings.

He had begun the afternoon by taking down from their places the various works in his meagre library which bore more or less relation to the task in hand. The threescore books which constituted his printed possessions were almost wholly from the press of the Book Concern; the few exceptions were volumes which, though published elsewhere, had come to him through that giant circulating agency of the General Conference, and wore the stamp of its approval. Perhaps it was the sight of these half-filled shelves which started this day's great revolution in Theron's opinion of himself. He had never thought much before about owning books. He had been too poor to buy many, and the conditions of canvassing about among one's parishioners which the thrifty Book Concern imposes upon those who would have without buying had always repelled him. Now, suddenly, as he moved along the two shelves, he felt ashamed at their beggarly showing.

"The Land and the Book," in three portly volumes, was the most pretentious of the aids which he finally culled from his collection. Beside it he laid out "Bible Lands," "Rivers and Lakes of Scripture," "Bible Manners and Customs," the "Genesis and Exodus" volume of Whedon's Commentary, some old numbers of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, and a copy of "Josephus," which had belonged to his grandmother, and had seen him through many a weary Sunday afternoon in boy-

hood. He glanced casually through these, one by one, as he took them down, and began to fear that they were not going to be of so much use as he had thought. Then, seating himself, he read carefully through the thirteen chapters of Genesis which chronicle the story of the founder of Israel.

Of course he had known this story from his earliest years. In almost every chapter he came now upon a phrase or an incident which had served him as the basis for a sermon. He had preached about Hagar in the wilderness, about Lot's wife, about the visit of the angels, about the intended sacrifice of Isaac, about a dozen other things suggested by the ancient narrative. Somehow this time it all seemed different to him. The people he read about were altered to his vision. Heretofore a poetic light had shone about them, where indeed they had not glowed in a halo of sanctification. Now, by some chance, this light was gone, and he saw them instead as untutored and unwashed barbarians, filled with animal lusts and ferocities, struggling by violence and foul chicanery to secure a foothold in a country which did not belong to them—all rude tramps and robbers of the uncivilised plain.

The apparent fact that Abram was a Chaldean struck him with peculiar force. How was it, he wondered, that this had never occurred to him before? Examining himself, he found that he had supposed

vaguely that there had been Jews from the beginning, or at least, say, from the Flood. But no, Abram was introduced simply as a citizen of the Chaldean town of Ur, and there was no hint of any difference in race between him and his neighbours. It was specially mentioned that his brother, Lot's father, died in Ur, the city of his nativity. Evidently the family belonged there, and were Chaldeans like the rest.

I do not cite this as at all a striking discovery, but it did have a curious effect upon Theron Ware. Up to that very afternoon, his notion of the kind of book he wanted to write had been founded upon a popular book called "Ruth the Moabiteess," written by a clergyman he knew very well, the Rev. E. Ray Mifflin. This model performance troubled itself not at all with difficult points, but went swimmingly along through scented summer seas of pretty rhetoric, teaching nothing, it is true, but pleasing a good deal and selling like hot cakes. Now all at once Theron felt that he hated that sort of book. *His* work should be of a vastly different order. He might fairly assume, he thought, that if the fact that Abram was a Chaldean was new to him, it would fall upon the world in general as a novelty. Very well then, there was his chance. He would write a learned book, showing who the Chaldeans were, and how their manners and beliefs differed from and influenced——

It was at this psychological instant that the wave of

self-condemnation suddenly burst upon and submerged the young clergyman. It passed again, leaving him staring fixedly at the pile of books he had taken down from the shelves, and gasping a little as if for breath. Then the humorous side of the thing, perversely enough, appealed to him, and he grinned feebly to himself at the joke of his having imagined that he could write learnedly about the Chaldeans, or anything else. But no, it shouldn't remain a joke! His long mobile face grew serious under the new resolve. He would learn what there was to be learned about the Chaldeans. He rose and walked up and down the room, gathering fresh strength of purpose as this inviting field of research spread out its vistas before him. Perhaps—yes, he would incidentally explore the mysteries of the Moabitic past as well, and thus put the Rev. E. Ray Mifflin to confusion on his own subject. That would in itself be a useful thing, because Mifflin wore kid gloves at the Conference and affected an intolerable superiority of dress and demeanour, and there would be general satisfaction among the plainer and worthier brethren at seeing him taken down a peg.

Now for the first time there rose distinctly in Theron's mind that casual allusion which Father Forbes had made to the Turanians. He recalled, too, his momentary feeling of mortification at not knowing who the Turanians were at the time. Possibly, if he had probed this matter

more deeply, now as he walked and pondered in the little living-room, he might have traced the whole of the afternoon's mental experiences to that chance remark of the Romish priest. But this speculation did not detain him. He mused instead upon the splendid library Father Forbes must have.

"Well, how does the book come on? Have you got to my Lady Keturah yet?"

It was Alice who spoke, opening the door from the kitchen, and putting in her head with a pretence of great and solemn caution, but with a correcting twinkle in her eyes.

"I haven't got to anybody yet," answered Theron absently. "These big things must be approached slowly."

"Come out to supper, then, while the beans are hot," said Alice.

The young minister sat through this other meal, again in deep abstraction. His wife pursued her little pleasantries about Keturah, the second wife, urging him with mock gravity to scold her roundly for daring to usurp Sarah's place, but Theron scarcely heard her, and said next to nothing. He ate sparingly, and fidgeted in his seat, waiting with obvious impatience for the finish of the meal. At last he rose abruptly.

"I've got a call to make—something with reference

to the book," he said. "I'll run out now, I think, before it gets dark."

He put on his hat, and strode out of the house as if his errand was of the utmost urgency. Once upon the street, however, his pace slackened. There was still a good deal of daylight outside, and he loitered aimlessly about, walking with bowed head and hands clasped behind him until dusk fell. Then he squared his shoulders, and started straight as the crow flies toward the residence of Father Forbes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE new Catholic church was the largest and most imposing public building in Octavius. Even in its unfinished condition, with a bald roofing of weather-beaten boards marking on the stunted tower the place where a spire was to begin later on, it dwarfed every other edifice of the sort in the town, just as it put them all to shame in the matter of the throngs it drew, rain or shine, to its services.

These facts had not heretofore been a source of satisfaction to the Rev. Theron Ware. He had even alluded to the subject in terms that gave his wife the impression that he actively deplored the strength and size of the Catholic denomination in this new home of theirs, and was troubled in his mind about Rome generally. But this evening he walked along the extended side of the big structure, which occupied nearly half the block, and then, turning the corner, passed in review its wide-doored, looming front, without any hostile emotions whatever. In the gathering dusk it seemed more massive than ever before, but he found himself only passively considering the odd statement he had heard, that all

Catholic church property was deeded absolutely in the name of the bishop of the diocese.

Only a narrow passage-way separated the church from the pastorate—a fine new brick residence standing flush upon the street. Theron mounted the steps and looked about for a bell-pull. Search revealed instead a little ivory button set in a ring of metal-work. He picked at this for a time with his finger-nail, before he made out the injunction, printed across it, to press. Of course! How stupid of him! This was one of those electric bells he had heard so much of, but which had not as yet made their way to the class of homes he knew. For custodians of a mediæval superstition and fanaticism, the Catholic clergy seemed very much up to date. This bell made him feel rather more a countryman than ever.

The door was opened by a tall, gaunt woman, who stood in black relief against the radiance of the hall-way while Theron, choosing his words with some diffidence, asked if the Rev. Mr. Forbes was in.

“He is,” came the hushed-voice answer. “He’s at dinner, though.”

It took the young minister a second or two to bring into association in his mind this evening hour and this midday meal. Then he began to say that he would call again—it was nothing special; but the woman suddenly cut him short by throwing the door wide open.

"It's Mr. Ware, is it not?" she asked, in a greatly altered tone. "Sure, he'd not have you go away. Come inside—do, sir! I'll tell him."

Theron, with a dumb show of reluctance, crossed the threshold. He noted now that the woman, who had bustled down the hall on her errand, was grey-haired and incredibly ugly, with a dark, sour face, glowering black eyes, and a twisted mouth. Then he saw that he was not alone in the hall-way. Three men and two women, all poorly clad and obviously working people, were seated in meek silence on a bench beyond the hat-rack. They glanced up at him for an instant, then resumed their patient study of the linoleum pattern on the floor at their feet.

"And will you kindly step in, sir?" the elderly gorgon had returned to ask. She led Mr. Ware along the hall-way to a door near the end, and opened it for him to pass before her.

He entered a room in which for the moment he could see nothing but a central glare of dazzling light beating down from a great shaded lamp upon a circular patch of white table-linen. Inside this ring of illumination points of fire sparkled from silver and porcelain, and two bars of burning crimson tracked across the cloth in reflection from tall glasses filled with wine. The rest of the room was vague darkness, but the gloom seemed saturated with novel aromatic odours, the ap-

petising scent of which bore clear relation to what Theron's blinking eyes rested upon.

He was able now to discern two figures at the table, outside the glowing circle of the lamp. They had both risen, and one came toward him with cordial celerity, holding out a white plump hand in greeting. He took this proffered hand rather limply, not wholly sure in the half-light that this really was Father Forbes, and began once more that everlasting apology to which he seemed doomed in the presence of the priest. It was broken abruptly off by the other's protesting laughter.

"My dear Mr. Ware, I beg of you," the priest urged, chuckling with hospitable mirth, "don't, don't apologise! I give you my word, nothing in the world could have pleased us better than your joining us here to-night. It was quite dramatic, your coming in as you did. We were speaking of you at that very moment. Oh, I forgot; let me make you acquainted with my friend—my very particular friend—Dr. Ledsmar. Let me take your hat; pray draw up a chair. Maggie will have a place laid for you in a minute."

"Oh, I assure you—I couldn't think of it—I've just eaten my—my—dinner," expostulated Theron. He murmured more inarticulate remonstrances a moment later, when the grim old domestic appeared with plates, serviette, and table-ware for his use, but she went on spreading them before him as if she heard nothing.

Thus committed against a decent show of resistance, the young minister did eat a little here and there of what was set before him, and was human enough to regret frankly that he could not eat more. It seemed to him very remarkable cookery—transfiguring so simple a thing as a steak, for example, quite out of recognition, and investing the humble potato with a charm he had never dreamed of. He wondered from time to time if it would be polite to ask how the potatoes were cooked, so that he might tell Alice.

The conversation at the table was not continuous, or even enlivened. After the lapses into silence became marked, Theron began to suspect that his refusal to drink wine had annoyed them, the more so as he had drenched a large section of table-cloth in his efforts to manipulate a siphon instead. He was greatly relieved, therefore, when Father Forbes explained in an incidental way that Dr. Ledsmar and he customarily ate their meals almost without a word.

“It’s a philosophic fad of his,” the priest went on smilingly, “and I have fallen in with it for the sake of a quiet life, so that when we do have company—that is to say, once in a blue moon—we display no manners to speak of.”

“I had always supposed—that is, I’ve always heard—that it was more healthful to talk at meals,” said

Theron. "Of course—what I mean is—I took it for granted all physicians thought so."

Dr. Ledsmar laughed. "That depends so much upon the quality of the meals," he remarked, holding his glass up to the light.

He seemed a man of middle age and an equable disposition. Theron, stealing stray glances at him around the lamp-shade, saw most distinctly of all a broad, impressive dome of skull, which, though obviously the result of baldness, gave the effect of quite belonging to the face. There were gold-rimmed spectacles, through which shone now and again the vivid sparkle of sharp, alert eyes, and there was a nose of some sort not easy to classify, at once long and thick. The rest was thin hair and short, full beard, mouse-coloured where the light caught them, but losing their outlines in the shadows of the background. Thereon had not heard of him among the physicians of Octavius. He wondered if he might not be a doctor of something else than medicine, and decided upon venturing the question.

"Oh yes, it is medicine," replied Ledsmar. "I am a doctor three or four times over, so far as parchments can make one. In some other respects, though, I should think I am probably less of a doctor than anybody else now living. I haven't practised—that is, regularly—for many years, and I take no interest whatever in keep-

ing abreast of what the profession regards as its progress. I know nothing beyond what was being taught in the 'sixties,' and that, I am glad to say, I have mostly forgotten."

"Dear me!" said Theron. "I had always supposed that science was the most engrossing of pursuits—that once a man took it up he never left it."

"But that would imply a connection between science and medicine," commented the Doctor. "My dear sir, they are not even on speaking terms."

"Shall we go upstairs?" put in the priest, rising from his chair. "It will be more comfortable to have our coffee there—unless, indeed, Mr. Ware, tobacco is unpleasant to you?"

"Oh my, no!" the young minister exclaimed, eager to free himself from the suggestion of being a kill-joy. "I don't smoke myself, but I am very fond of the odour, I assure you."

Father Forbes led the way out. It could be seen now that he wore a long house-gown of black silk, skilfully moulded to his erect, shapely, and rounded form. Though he carried this with the natural grace of a proud and beautiful belle, there was no hint of the feminine in his bearing, or in the contour of his pale, firm-set, handsome face. As he moved through the hall-way the five people whom Theron had seen waiting rose from their bench, and two of the women began in humble

murmurs, "If you please, Father," and "Good evening to your riverence;" but the priest merely nodded and passed on up the staircase, followed by his guests. The people sat down on their bench again.

A few minutes later, reclining at his ease in a huge low chair, and feeling himself unaccountably at home in the most luxuriously appointed and delightful little room he had ever seen, the Rev. Theron Ware sipped his unaccustomed coffee and embarked upon an explanation of his errand. Somehow the very profusion of scholarly symbols about him—the great dark rows of encased and crowded book-shelves rising to the ceiling, the classical engravings upon the wall, the revolving book-case, the reading-stand, the mass of littered magazines, reviews, and papers at either end of the costly and elaborate writing-desk—seemed to make it the easier for him to explain without reproach that he needed information about Abraham. He told them quite in detail the story of his book.

The two others sat watching him through a faint haze of scented smoke, with polite encouragement on their faces. Father Forbes took the added trouble to nod understandingly at the various points of the narrative, and when it was finished gave one of his little approving chuckles.

"This skirts very closely upon sorcery," he said smilingly. "Do you know, there is perhaps not another

man in the country who knows Assyriology so thoroughly as our friend here, Dr. Ledsmar."

"That's putting it too strong," remarked the Doctor. "I only follow at a distance—a year or two behind. But I dare say I can help you. You are quite welcome to anything I have; my books cover the ground pretty well up to last year. Delitzsch is very interesting, but Baudissin's *Studien zur Semitischen Religionsgeschichte* would come closer to what you need. There are several other important Germans—Schrader, Bunsen, Duncker, Hommel, and so on."

"Unluckily I—I don't read German readily," Theron explained with diffidence.

"That's a pity," said the Doctor, "because they do the best work—not only in this field, but in most others; and they do so much that the mass defies translation. Well, the best thing outside of German, of course, is Sayce. I dare say you know him, though."

The Rev. Mr. Ware shook his head mournfully. "I don't seem to know anyone," he murmured.

The others exchanged glances.

"But if I may ask, Mr. Ware," pursued the Doctor, regarding their guest with interest through his spectacles, "why do you specially hit upon Abraham? He is full of difficulties—enough, just now at any rate, to warn off the bravest scholar. Why not take something easier?"

Theron had recovered something of his confidence. "Oh no," he said, "that is just what attracts me to Abraham. I like the complexities and contradictions in his character. Take, for instance, all that strange and picturesque episode of Hagar; see the splendid contrast between the craft and commercial guile of his dealings in Egypt and with Abimelech, and the simple, straightforward godliness of his later years. No; all those difficulties only attract me. Do you happen to know—of course you would know—do those German books, or the others, give anywhere any additional details of the man himself and his sayings and doings—little things which help, you know, to round out one's conception of the individual?"

Again the priest and the Doctor stole a furtive glance across the young minister's head. It was Father Forbes who replied.

"I fear that you are taking our friend Abraham too literally, Mr. Ware," he said, in a gentle semblance of paternal tones which seemed to go so well with his gown. "Modern research, you know, quite wipes him out of existence as an individual. The word Abram is merely an eponym; it means 'exalted father.' Practically all the names in the Genesis chronologies are what we call eponymous. Abram is not a person at all; he is a tribe, a sept, a clan. In the same way,

Shem is not intended for a man; it is the name of a great division of the human race. Heber is simply the throwing back into allegorical substance, so to speak, of the Hebrews; Heth, of the Hittites; Assher, of Assyria."

"But this is something very new, this theory, isn't it?" queried Theron.

The priest smiled and shook his head. "Bless you, no! My dear sir, there is nothing new. Epicurus and Lucretius outlined the whole Darwinian theory more than two thousand years ago. As for this eponym thing, why, St. Augustine called attention to it fifteen hundred years ago. In his *De Civitate Dei* he expressly says of these genealogical names, '*gentes non homines*'—that is, 'peoples, not persons.' It was as obvious to him—as much a commonplace of knowledge—as it was to Ezekiel eight hundred years before him."

"It seems passing strange that we should not know it now, then," commented Theron. "I mean, that everybody shouldn't know it."

Father Forbes gave a little purring chuckle. "Ah, there we get upon contentious ground," he remarked. "Why should 'everybody' be supposed to know anything at all? What business is it of 'everybody's' to know things? The earth was just as round in the days when people supposed it to be flat as it is now. So

the truth remains always the truth, even though you give a charter to ten hundred thousand separate num-skulls to examine it by the light of their private judgment, and report that it is as many different varieties of something else. But of course that whole question of private judgment *versus* authority is No-Man's-Land for us. We were speaking of eponyms."

"Yes," said Theron; "it is very interesting."

"There is a curious phase of the subject which hasn't been worked out much," continued the priest. "Probably the Germans will get at that, too, sometime. They are doing the best Irish work in other fields, as it is. I spoke of Heber and Heth, in Genesis, as meaning the Hebrews and the Hittites. Now my own people, the Irish, have far more ancient legends and traditions than any other nation west of Athens; and you find in their myth of the Milesian invasion and conquest two principal leaders called Heber and Ith, or Heth. That is supposed to be comparatively modern, about the time of Solomon's temple; but these independent Irish myths go back to the fall of the tower of Babel, and they have there an ancestor, grandson of Japhet, named Fenius Farsa, and they ascribe to him the invention of the alphabet. They took their ancient name of Feine, the modern Fenian, from him. Oddly enough, that is the name which the Romans knew the Phœnicians by, and to them also is ascribed the invention of the alpha-

bet. The Irish have a holy salmon of knowledge, just like the Chaldean man-fish. The Druids' tree-worship is identical with that of the Chaldeans—those pagan groves, you know, which the Jews were always being punished for building. You see, there is nothing new. Everything is built on the ruins of something else. Just as the material earth is made up of countless billions of dead men's bones, so the mental world is all alive with the ghosts of dead men's thoughts and beliefs, the wraiths of dead races' faiths and imaginings."

Father Forbes paused, then added with a twinkle in his eye: "That peroration is from an old sermon of mine, in the days when I used to preach. I remember rather liking it at the time."

"But you still preach?" asked the Rev. Mr. Ware, with lifted brows.

"No; no more. I only talk now and again," answered the priest, with what seemed a suggestion of curtness. He made haste to take the conversation back again. "The names of these dead-and-gone things are singularly pertinacious, though. They survive indefinitely. Take the modern name Marmaduke, for example. It strikes one as peculiarly modern, up to date, doesn't it? Well, it is the oldest name on earth—thousands of years older than Adam. It is the ancient Chaldean Meridug or Merodach. He was the young god who interceded

continually between the angry, omnipotent Ea, his father, and the humble and unhappy Damkina, or earth, who was his mother. This is interesting from another point of view, because this Merodach or Marmaduke is, so far as we can see now, the original prototype of our 'divine intermediary' idea. I dare say, though, that if we could go back still other scores of centuries, we should find whole receding series of types of this Christ-myth of ours."

Theron Ware sat upright at the fall of these words, and flung a swift, startled look about the room—the instinctive glance of a man unexpectedly confronted with peril, and casting desperately about for means of defence and escape. For the instant his mind was aflame with this vivid impression—that he was among sinister enemies, at the mercy of criminals. He half rose under the impelling stress of this feeling, with the sweat standing on his brow and his jaw dropped in a scared and bewildered stare.

Then, quite as suddenly, the sense of shock was gone, and it was as if nothing at all had happened. He drew a long breath, took another sip of his coffee, and found himself all at once reflecting almost pleasurably upon the charm of contact with really educated people. He leaned back in the big chair again and smiled, to show these men of the world how much at his ease he

was. It required an effort, he discovered, but he made it bravely, and hoped he was succeeding.

"It hasn't been in my power to at all lay hold of what the world keeps on learning nowadays about its babyhood," he said. "All I have done is to try to preserve an open mind, and to maintain my faith that the more we know, the nearer we shall approach the Throne."

Dr. Ledsmar abruptly scuffed his feet on the floor and took out his watch. "I'm afraid——" he began.

"No, no! There's plenty of time," remarked the priest, with his soft half-smile and purring tones. "You finish your cigar here with Mr. Ware, and excuse me while I run down and get rid of the people in the hall."

Father Forbes tossed his cigar-end into the fender. Then he took from the mantel a strange three-cornered black velvet cap, with a dangling silk tassel at the side, put it on his head, and went out.

Theron, being left alone with the Doctor, hardly knew what to do or say. He took up a paper from the floor beside him, but realised that it would be impolite to go further, and laid it on his knee. Some trace of that earlier momentary feeling that he was in hostile hands came back, and worried him. He lifted himself upright in the chair, and then became conscious that

what really disturbed him was the fact that Dr. Ledsmar had turned in his seat, crossed his legs, and was contemplating him with a gravely concentrated scrutiny through his spectacles.

This uncomfortable gaze kept itself up a long way beyond the point of good manners, but the Doctor seemed not to mind that at all.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Dr. Ledsmar finally spoke, it was in a kindlier tone than the young minister had looked for. "I had half a notion of going to hear you preach the other evening," he said, "but at the last minute I backed out. I dare say I shall pluck up the courage sooner or later, and really go. It must be fully twenty years since I last heard a sermon, and I had supposed that that would suffice for the rest of my life. But they tell me that you are worth while, and, for some reason or other, I find myself curious on the subject."

Involved and dubious though the compliment might be, Theron felt himself flushing with satisfaction. He nodded his acknowledgment and changed the topic.

"I was surprised to hear Father Forbes say that he did not preach," he remarked.

"Why should he?" asked the Doctor indifferently. "I suppose he hasn't more than fifteen parishioners in a thousand who would understand him if he did, and of these probably twelve would join in a complaint to his Bishop about the heterodox tone of his sermon. There is no point in his going to all that pains merely to incur

that risk. Nobody wants him to preach, and he has reached an age where personal vanity no longer tempts him to do so. What *is* wanted of him is that he should be the paternal, ceremonial, authoritative head and centre of his flock, adviser, monitor, overseer, elder brother, friend, patron, seigneur—whatever you like—everything except a bore. They draw the line at that. You see how diametrically opposed this Catholic point of view is to the Protestant.”

“The difference does seem extremely curious to me,” said Theron. “Now, those people in the hall——”

“Go on,” put in the Doctor, as the other faltered hesitatingly. “I know what you were going to say. It struck you as odd that he should let them wait on the bench, there, while he came up here to smoke.”

Theron smiled faintly. “I *was* thinking that my—my parishioners wouldn’t have taken it so quietly. But, of course, it is all so different.”

“As chalk from cheese,” said Dr. Ledsmar, lighting a fresh cigar. “I dare say everyone you saw there had come to either take the pledge, or see to it that one of the others took it. That is the chief industry in the hall, so far as I have observed. Now, discipline is an important element in the machinery here. Coming to take the pledge implies that you have been drunk and are now ashamed. Both states have their values, but they are opposed. Sitting on that bench tends to

develop penitence to the prejudice of alcoholism. But at no stage would it ever occur to the occupant of the bench that he was the best judge of how long he was to sit there, or that his priest should interrupt his dinner or general personal routine in order to administer that pledge. Now, I dare say you have no people at all coming to 'swear off.'"

The Rev. Mr. Ware shook his head. "No; if a man with us got as bad as all that, he wouldn't come near the church at all. He'd simply drop out, and there would be an end to it."

"Quite so," interjected the Doctor. "That is the voluntary system. But these fellows *can't* drop out. There's no bottom to the Catholic Church. Everything that's in stays in. If you don't mind my saying so—of course I view you all impartially from the outside—but it seems logical to me that a Church should exist for those who need its help, and not for those who by their own profession are so good already that it is they who help the Church. Now, you turn a man out of your Church who behaves badly: that must be on the theory that his remaining in would injure the Church, and that in turn involves the idea that it is the excellent character of the parishioners which imparts virtue to the Church. The Catholics' conception, you see, is quite the converse. Such virtue as they keep in stock is on tap, so to speak, here in the Church itself, and the parishioners come

and get some for themselves according to their need for it. Some come every day, some only once a year, some perhaps never between their baptism and their funeral. But they all have a right here, the professional burglar every whit as much as the speckless saint. The only stipulation is, that they oughtn't to come under false pretences: the burglar is in honour bound not to pass himself off to his priest as the saint. But that is merely a moral obligation, established in the burglar's own interest. It does him no good to come unless he feels that he is playing the rules of the game, and one of these is Confession. If he cheats there, he knows that he is cheating nobody but himself, and might much better have stopped away altogether."

Theron nodded his head comprehendingly. He had a great many views about the Romish rite of confession which did not at all square with this statement of the case, but this did not seem a specially fit time for bringing them forth. There was, indeed, a sense of languid repletion in his mind, as if it had been overfed and wanted to lie down for a while. He contented himself with nodding again, and murmuring reflectively, "Yes, it is all strangely different."

His tone was an invitation to silence, and the Doctor turned his attention to the cigar, studying its ash for a minute with an air of deep meditation, and then solemnly blowing out a slow series of smoke-rings. Theron

watched him with an indolent, placid eye, wondering lazily if it was, after all, so very pleasant to smoke.

There fell upon this silence, with a softness so delicate that it came almost like a progression in the hush, the sound of sweet music. For a little, strain and source were alike indefinite—an impalpable setting to harmony of the mellowed light, the perfumed opalescence of the air, the luxury and charm of the room. Then it rose, as by a sweeping curve of beauty, into a firm, calm, severe melody, delicious to the ear, but as cold in the mind's vision as moonlit sculpture. It went on upward with stately collectedness of power, till the atmosphere seemed all alive with the trembling consciousness of the presence of lofty souls, sternly pure and pitilessly great.

Theron found himself moved as he had never been before. He almost resented the discovery, when it was presented to him by the prosaic, mechanical side of his brain, that he was listening to organ music, and that it came through the open window from the church close by. He would fain have reclined in his chair, and closed his eyes, and saturated himself with the uttermost fulness of the sensation. Yet, in absurd despite of himself, he rose and moved over to the window.

Only a narrow alley separated the pastorate from the church; Mr. Ware could have touched with a walking-stick the opposite wall. Directly facing him was the

arched and mullioned top of a great window. A dim light from within shone through the more translucent portions of the glass below, throwing out faint little bars of parti-coloured radiance upon the blackness of the deep passage-way. He could vaguely trace by these the outlines of some sort of picture on the window. There were human figures in it, and—yes—up here in the centre, nearest him, was a woman's head. There was a halo about it, engirdling rich flowing waves of reddish hair, the lights in which glowed like flame. The face itself was barely distinguishable, but its half-suggested form raised a curious sense of resemblance to some other face. He looked at it closely, blankly, the noble music throbbing through his brain meanwhile.

"It's that Madden girl," he suddenly heard a voice say by his side. Dr. Ledsmar had followed him to the window, and was close at his shoulder.

Theron's thoughts were upon the puzzling shadowed lineaments on the stained glass. He saw now in a flash the resemblance which had baffled him. "*It is like her, of course,*" he said.

"Yes, unfortunately, *it is just like her,*" replied the Doctor, with a hostile note in his voice. "Whenever I am dining here she always goes in next door and kicks up that racket. She knows I hate it."

"Oh, you mean that it is she who is playing," re-

marked Theron. "I thought you referred to—at least—I was thinking of——"

His sentence died off in in consequence. He had a feeling that he did not want to talk with the Doctor about the stained-glass likeness. The music had sunk away now into fragmentary and unconnected passages, broken here and there by abrupt stops. Dr. Ledsmar stretched an arm out past him and shut the window. "Let's hear as little of the row as we can," he said, and the two went back to their chairs.

"Pardon me for the question," the Rev. Mr. Ware said, after a pause which began to affect him as constrained, "but something you said about dining—you don't live here, then? In the house, I mean?"

The Doctor laughed, a characteristically dry little laugh, which struck Theron at once as bearing a sort of black-sheep relationship to the priest's habitual chuckle. "That must have been puzzling you no end," he said, "that notion that the pastorate kept a devil's advocate on the premises. No, Mr. Ware, I don't live here. I inhabit a house of my own; you may have seen it, an old-fashioned place up beyond the race-course, with a sort of tower at the back, and a big garden. But I dine here three or four times a week. It is an old arrangement of ours. Vincent and I have been friends for many years now. We are quite alone in the world, we two, much to our mutual satisfaction. You must

come up and see me some time; come up and have a look over the books we were speaking of."

"I am much obliged," said Theron, without enthusiasm. The thought of the Doctor by himself did not attract him greatly.

The reservation in his tone seemed to interest the Doctor. "I suppose you are the first man I have asked in a dozen years," he remarked, frankly willing that the young minister should appreciate the favour extended him. "It must be fully that since anybody but Vincent Forbes has been under my roof; that is, of my own species, I mean."

"You live there quite alone," commented Theron.

"Quite; with my dogs and cats and lizards, and my Chinaman. I mustn't forget him." The Doctor noted the inquiry in the other's lifted brows, and smilingly explained—"He is my solitary servant. Possibly he might not appeal to you much, but I can assure you he used to interest Octavius a great deal when I first brought him here ten years ago or so. He afforded occupation for all the idle boys in the village for a twelvemonth at least. They used to lie in wait for him all day long, with stones or horse-chestnuts or snowballs, according to the season. The Irishmen from the waggon-works nearly killed him once or twice, but he patiently lived it all down. The Chinaman has the patience to live every-

thing down, the Caucasian races included. He will see us all to bed, will that gentleman with the pigtail!"

The music over in the church had lifted itself again into form and sequence, and defied the closed window. If anything it was louder than before, and the sonorous roar of the bass-pedals seemed to be shaking the very walls. It was something with a big-lunged, exultant, triumphing swing in it, something which ought to have been sung on the battlefield at the close of day by the whole jubilant army of victors. It was impossible to pretend not to be listening to it, but the Doctor submitted with an obvious scowl, and bit off the tip of his third cigar with an annoyed air.

"You don't seem to care much for music," suggested Mr. Ware when a lull came.

Dr. Ledsmar looked up, lighted match in hand. "Say musicians!" he growled. "Has it ever occurred to you," he went on between puffs at the flame, "that the only animals who make the noises we call music are of the bird family, a debased offshoot of the reptilian creation, the very lowest types of the Vertebrata now in existence? I insist upon the parallel among humans. I have in my time, sir, had considerable opportunities for studying close at hand the various orders of mammalia who devote themselves to what they describe as the arts. It may sound a harsh judgment, but I am convinced that musicians stand on the very bottom rung of

the ladder in the sub-cellar of human intelligence, even lower than painters and actors."

This seemed such unqualified nonsense to the Rev. Mr. Ware that he offered no comment whatever upon it. He tried instead to divert his thoughts to the stormy strains which rolled in through the vibrating brickwork, and to picture to himself the large, capable figure of Miss Madden, seated in the half-light at the organ-board, swaying to and fro in a splendid ecstasy of power as she evoked at will this superb and ordered uproar. But the Doctor broke insistently in upon his musings.

"All art, so called, is decay," he said, raising his voice. "When a race begins to brood on the beautiful, so-called, it is a sign of rot, of getting ready to fall from the tree. Take the Jews, those marvellous old fellows, who were never more than a handful, yet have imposed the rule of their ideas and their gods upon us for fifteen hundred years. Why? They were forbidden by their most fundamental law to make sculptures or pictures. That was at a time when the Egyptians, when the Assyrians and other Semites, were running to artistic riot. Every great museum in the world now has whole floors devoted to statues from the Nile, and marvellous carvings from the palaces of Sargon and Assurbanipal. You can get the artistic remains of the Jews during that whole period into a child's perambulator. They had the sense and strength to penalise art; they alone sur-

vived. They saw the Egyptians go, the Assyrians go, the Greeks go, the late Romans go, the Moors in Spain go, all the artistic people perish. They remained, triumphing over all. Now at last their long-belated apogee is here, their decline is at hand. I am told that in this present generation in Europe the Jews are producing a great lot of young painters and sculptors and actors, just as for a century they have been producing famous composers and musicians. That means the end of the Jews."

"What! have you only got as far as that?" came the welcome interruption of a cheery voice. Father Forbes had entered the room, and stood looking down with a whimsical twinkle in his eye from one to the other of his guests.

"You must have been taken over the ground at a very slow pace, Mr. Ware," he continued, chuckling softly, "to have arrived merely at the collapse of the New Jerusalem. I fancied I had given him time enough to bring you straight up to the end of all of us, with that Chinaman of his gently slapping our graves with his pigtail. That's where the Doctor always winds up, if he's allowed to run his course."

"It has all been very interesting—extremely so, I assure you," faltered Theron. It had become suddenly apparent to him that he desired nothing so much as to

make his escape—that he had, indeed, only been waiting for the host's return to do so.

He rose at this, and explained that he must be going. No special effort being put forth to restrain him, he presently made his way out, Father Forbes hospitably following him down to the door, and putting a very gracious cordiality into his *adieux*.

The night was warm and black. Theron stood still in it the moment the pastorate door had closed; the sudden darkness was so thick that it was as if he had closed his eyes. His dominant sensation was of a deep relief and rest after some undue fatigue. It crossed his mind that drunken men probably felt like that as they leaned against things on their way home. He was affected himself, he saw, by the weariness and half-nausea following a mental intoxication. The conceit pleased him, and he smiled to himself as he turned and took the first homeward steps. It must be growing late, he thought. Alice would be wondering as she waited.

There was a street lamp at the corner, and as he walked toward it he noted all at once that his feet were keeping step to the movement of the music proceeding from the organ within the church, a vaguely processional air, marked enough in measure, but still with a dreamy effect. It became a pleasure to identify his progress with the quaint rhythm of sound as he sauntered along.

He discovered, as he neared the light, that he was instinctively stepping over the seams in the flagstone sidewalk, as he had done as a boy. He smiled again at this. There *was* something exceptionally juvenile and buoyant about his mood, now that he examined it. He set it down as a reaction from that Doctor's extravagant and incendiary talk. One thing was certain—he would never be caught up at that house beyond the race-course, with its reptiles and its Chinaman. Should he ever even go to the pastorate again? He decided not to quite definitely answer *that* in the negative, but as he felt now the chances were all against it.

Turning the corner and walking off into the shadows along the side of the huge church building, Theron noted almost at the end of the edifice a small door, the entrance to a porch coming out to the side-walk, which stood wide open. A thin pale vertical line of light showed that the inner door, too, was ajar.

Through this wee aperture the organ music, reduced and mellowed by distance, came to him again with that same curious intimate personal relation which had so moved him at the start, before the Doctor closed the window. It was as if it was being played for him alone.

He paused for a doubting minute or two, with bowed head, listening to the exquisite harmony which floated out to caress and soothe and enfold him. There was

no spiritual, or at least pious, effect in it now. He fancied that it must be secular music, or if not, then something adapted to marriage ceremonies—rich, vivid, passionate, a celebration of beauty and the glory of possession, with its ruling note of joy only heightened by soft wooing interludes, and here and there the tremor of a fond, timid little sob.

Theron turned away irresolutely, half frightened at the undreamt-of impression this music was making upon him. Then, all at once, he wheeled, and stepped boldly into the porch, pushing the inner door open and hearing it rustle against its leathern frame as it swung to behind him.

He had never been inside a Catholic church before.

CHAPTER IX.

JEREMIAH MADDEN was supposed to be probably the richest man in Octavius. There was no doubt at all about his being its least pretentious citizen.

The huge and ornate modern mansion which he had built, putting to shame every other house in the place, gave an effect of ostentation to the Maddens as a family; it seemed only to accentuate the air of humility which enveloped Jeremiah as with a garment. Everybody knew some version of the many tales afloat which, in a kindly spirit, illustrated the incongruity between him and his splendid habitation. Some had it that he slept in the shed. Others told whimsical stories of his sitting alone in the kitchen evenings, smoking his old clay pipe, and sorrowing because the second Mrs. Madden would not suffer the pigs and chickens to come in and bear him company. But no matter how comic the exaggeration, these legends were invariably amiable. It lay in no man's mouth to speak harshly of Jeremiah Madden.

He had been born a Connemara peasant, and he would die one. When he was ten years old he had seen some of his own family, and many of his neigh-

bours, starve to death. He could remember looking at the stiffened figure of a woman stretched on the stones by the roadside, with the green stain of nettles on her white lips. A girl five years or so older than himself, also a Madden and distantly related, had started in despair off across the mountains to the town where it was said the poor-law officers were dealing out food. He could recall her coming back next day, wild-eyed with hunger and the fever; the officers had refused her relief because her bare legs were not wholly shrunk to the bone. "While there's a calf on the shank there's no starvation," they had explained to her. The girl died without profiting by this official apothegm. The boy found it burned ineffaceably upon his brain. Now, after a lapse of more than forty years, it seemed the thing that he remembered best about Ireland.

He had drifted westward as an unconsidered, unresisting item in that vast flight of the famine years. Others whom he rubbed against in that melancholy exodus, and deemed of much greater promise than himself, had done badly. Somehow he did well. He learned the wheelwright's trade—and really that seemed all there was to tell. The rest had been calm and sequent progression—steady employment as a journeyman first; then marriage and a house and lot; the modest start as a master; the move to Octavius and cheap lumber; the growth of his business, always marked,

of late years stupendous—all following naturally, easily, one thing out of another. Jeremiah encountered the idea among his fellows now and again that he was entitled to feel proud of all this. He smiled to himself at the thought, and then sent a sigh after the smile. What was it all but empty and transient vanity? The score of other Connemara boys he had known—none very fortunate, several broken tragically in prison or the gutter, nearly all now gone the way of flesh—were as good as he. He could not have it in his heart to take credit for his success; it would have been like sneering over their poor graves.

Jeremiah Madden was now over fifty—a little man of a reddened, weather-worn skin and a meditative, almost saddened, aspect. He had blue eyes, but his scanty iron-grey hair showed raven black in its shadows. The width and prominence of his cheek-bones dominated all one's recollections of his face. The long vertical upper lip and irregular teeth made, in repose, an unshapely mouth; its smile, though, sweetened the whole countenance. He wore a fringe of stiff, steel-coloured beard, passing from ear to ear under his chin. His week-day clothes were as simple as his workaday manners, fitting his short black pipe and his steadfast devotion to his business. On Sundays he dressed with a certain rigour of respectability, all in black, and laid aside tobacco, at least to the public view. He never

missed going to early low mass, quite alone. His family always came later, at the ten o'clock high mass.

There had been, at one time or another, a good many members of this family. Two wives had borne Jeremiah Madden a total of over a dozen children. Of these there survived now only two of the first Mrs. Madden's offspring—Michael and Celia—and a son of the present wife, who had been baptised Terence, but called himself Theodore. This minority of the family inhabited the great new house on Main Street. Jeremiah went every Sunday afternoon by himself to kneel in the presence of the majority, there where they lay in St. Agnes' consecrated ground. If the weather was good he generally extended his walk through the fields to an old deserted Catholic burial-field, which had been used only in the first years after the famine invasion, and now was clean forgotten. The old waggon-maker liked to look over the primitive, neglected stones which marked the graves of these earlier exiles. Fully half of the inscriptions mentioned his County Galway; there were two naming the very parish adjoining his. The latest date on any stone was of the remoter 'fifties. They had all been stricken down, here in this strange land with its bitter winters, while the memory of their own soft, humid, gentle, west-coast air was fresh within them. Musing upon the clumsy sculpture, with its "R.I.P." or "Pray for the soul of," half to be guessed under the stain and

moss of a generation, there would seem to him but a step from this present to that heart-rending awful past. What had happened between was a meaningless vision, as impersonal as the passing of the planets overhead. He rarely had an impulse to tears in the new cemetery, where his ten children were. He never left this weed-grown, forsaken old God's-acre dry-eyed.

One must not construct from all this the image of a melancholy man, as his fellows met and knew him. Mr. Madden kept his griefs, racial and individual, for his own use. To the men about him in the offices and the shops he presented, day after day, year after year, an imperturbable cheeriness of demeanour. He had been always fortunate in the selection of lieutenants and chief helpers. Two of these had grown now into partners, and were almost as much a part of the big enterprise as Jeremiah himself. They spoke often of their inability to remember any unjust or petulant word of his, much less any unworthy deed. Once they had seen him in a great rage, all the more impressive because he said next to nothing. A thoughtless fellow told a dirty story in the presence of some apprentices, and Madden, listening to this, drove the offender implacably from his employ. It was years now since anyone who knew him had ventured upon lewd pleasantries in his hearing. Jokes of the sort which women might hear he was very fond of, though he had not much humour of his own. Of

books he knew nothing whatever, and he made only the most perfunctory pretence now and again of reading the newspapers.

The elder son, Michael, was very like his father—diligent, unassuming, kindly, and simple; a plain, tall, thin, red man of nearly thirty, who toiled in paper cap and rolled-up shirt-sleeves as the superintendent in the sawmill, and put on no airs whatever as the son of the master. If there was surprise felt at his not being taken into the firm as a partner, he gave no hint of sharing it. He attended to his religious duties with great zeal, and was president of the Sodality as a matter of course. This was regarded as his blind side, and young employes who cultivated it, and made broad their phylacteries under his notice, certainly had an added chance of getting on well in the works. To some few whom he knew specially well Michael would confess that, if he had had the brains for it, he should wish to have been a priest. He displayed no inclination to marry.

The other brother, Terence, was some eight years younger and seemed the product of a wholly different race. The contrast between Michael's sandy skin and long gaunt visage and this dark boy's handsome, rounded face, with its prettily curling black hair, large, heavily fringed brown eyes, and delicately modelled features, was not more obvious than their temperamental separation. This second lad had been away for years at

school—indeed, at a good many schools, for no one seemed to manage to keep him long. He had been with the Jesuits at Georgetown, with the Christian Brothers at Manhattan; the sectarian Mt. St. Mary's, and the severely secular Annapolis had both been tried, and proved misfits. The young man was home again now, and save that his name had become Theodore, he appeared in nowise changed from the beautiful, wilful, bold and showy boy who had gone away in his teens. He was still rather small for his years, but so gracefully moulded in form and so perfectly tailored that the fact seemed rather an advantage than otherwise. He never dreamed of going near the waggon-works, but he did go a good deal—in fact most of the time—to the Nedahma Club. His mother spoke often to her friends about her fears for his health. He never spoke to his friends about his mother at all.

The second Mrs. Madden did not, indeed, appeal strongly to the family pride. She had been a Miss Foley, a dressmaker and an old maid. Jeremiah had married her after a brief widowerhood, principally because she was the sister of his parish priest and had a considerable reputation for piety. It was at a time when the expansion of his business was promising certain wealth and suggesting the removal to Octavius. He was conscious of a notion that his obligations to social respectability were increasing; it was certain that the em-

barrassments of a motherless family were. Miss Foley had shown a good deal of attention to his little children. She was not ill-looking, she bore herself with modesty, she was the priest's sister, the niece once removed of a Vicar-General. And so it came about.

Although those most concerned did not say so, everybody could see from the outset the pity of its ever having come about at all. The pious and stiffly respectable priest's sister had been harmless enough as a spinster. It made the heart ache to contemplate her as a wife. Incredibly narrow-minded, ignorant, suspicious, vain, and sour-tempered, she must have driven a less equable and well-rooted man than Jeremiah Madden to drink or flight. He may have had his temptations, but they made no mark on the even record of his life. He only worked the harder, concentrating upon his business those extra hours which another sort of home-life would have claimed instead. The end of twenty years found him a rich man, but still toiling pertinaciously day by day, as if he had his wage to earn. In the great house which had been built to please, or rather placate, his wife, he kept to himself as much as possible. The popular story of his smoking alone in the kitchen was more or less true; only Michael, as a rule, sat with him, too weak-lunged for tobacco himself, but reading stray scraps from the papers to the lonely old man, and talking with him about the works, the while Jeremiah

meditatively sucked his clay pipe. One or two evenings in the week the twain spent up in Celia's part of the house, listening with the awe of simple, honest mechanics to the music she played for them.

Celia was to them something indefinably less, indescribably more, than a daughter and sister. They could not think there had ever been anything like her before in the world; the notion of criticising any deed or word of hers would have appeared to them monstrous and unnatural.

She seemed to have come up to this radiant and wise and marvellously talented womanhood of hers, to their minds, quite spontaneously. There had been a little Celia—a red-headed, sulky, mutinous slip of a girl, always at war with her stepmother, and affording no special comfort or hope to the rest of the family. Then there was a long gap, during which the father four times a year handed Michael a letter he had received from the superioress of a distant convent, referring with cold formality to the studies and discipline by which Miss Madden might profit more if she had been better brought up, and enclosing a large bill. Then all at once they beheld a big Celia, whom they spoke of as being home again, but who really seemed never to have been there before—a tall, handsome, confident young woman, swift of tongue and apprehension, appearing to know everything there was to be known by the most

learned, able to paint pictures, carve wood, speak in divers languages, and make music for the gods; yet with it all a very proud lady, one might say a queen.

The miracle of such a Celia as this impressed itself even upon the stepmother. Mrs. Madden had looked forward with a certain grim tightening of her combative jaws to the home-coming of the "red-head." She felt herself much more the fine lady than she had been when the girl went away. She had her carriage now, and the magnificent new house was nearly finished, and she had a greater number of ailments and spent far more money on doctors' bills than any other lady in the whole section. The flush of pride in her greatest achievement up to date—having the most celebrated of New York physicians brought up to Octavius by special train—still prickled in her blood. It was in all the papers, and the admiration of the flatterers and "soft-sawdherers"—wives of Irish merchants and smaller professional men who formed her social circle—was raising visions in her poor head of going next year with Theodore to Saratoga, and fastening the attention of the whole fashionable republic upon the variety and resources of her invalidism. Mrs. Madden's fancy did not run to the length of seeing her stepdaughter also at Saratoga; it pictured her still as the sullen and hated "red-head," moping defiantly in corners, or courting by

her insolence the punishments which leaped against their leash in the stepmother's mind to get at her.

The real Celia, when she came, fairly took Mrs. Madden's breath away. The peevish little plans for annoyance and tyranny, the resolutions born of ignorant and jealous egotism, found themselves swept out of sight by the very first swirl of Celia's dress-train, when she came down from her room robed in peacock blue. The stepmother could only stare.

Now, after two years of it, Mrs. Madden still viewed her stepdaughter with round-eyed uncertainty, not unmixed with wrathful fear. She still drove about behind two magnificent horses; the new house had become almost tiresome by familiarity; her pre-eminence in the interested minds of the Dearborn County Medical Society was as towering as ever, but somehow it was all different. There was a note of unreality nowadays in Mrs. Donnelly's professions of wonder at her bearing up under her multiplied maladies; there was almost a leer of mockery in the sympathetic smirk with which the Misses Mangan listened to her symptoms. Even the doctors, though they kept their faces turned toward her, obviously did not pay much attention; the people in the street seemed no longer to look at her and her equipage at all. Worst of all, something of the meaning of this managed to penetrate her own mind. She caught now and again a dim glimpse of herself as others must have been seeing

her for years—as a stupid, ugly, boastful, and bad-tempered old nuisance; and it was always as if she saw this in a mirror held up by Celia.

Of open discord there had been next to none. Celia would not permit it, and showed this so clearly from the start that there was scarcely need for her saying it. It seemed hardly necessary for her to put into words any of her desires, for that matter. All existing arrangements in the Madden household seemed to shrink automatically and make room for her, whichever way she walked. A whole quarter of the unfinished house set itself apart for her. Partitions altered themselves, doorways moved across to opposite sides, a recess opened itself, tall and deep, for it knew not what statue—simply because, it seemed, the Lady Celia willed it so.

When the family moved into this mansion, it was with a consciousness that the only one who really belonged there was Celia. She alone could behave like one perfectly at home. It seemed entirely natural to the others that she should do just what she liked, shut them off from her portion of the house, take her meals there if she felt disposed, and keep such hours as pleased her instant whim. If she awakened them at midnight by her piano, or deferred her breakfast to the late afternoon, they felt that it must be all right, since Celia did it. She had one room furnished with only divans

and huge soft cushions, containing they knew large casts of statuary not too strictly clothed, which she would suffer no one, not even the servants, to enter. Michael fancied sometimes, when he passed the draped entrance to this sacred chamber, that the *portière* smelt of tobacco, but he would not have spoken of it even had he been sure. Old Jeremiah, whose established habit it was to audit minutely the expenses of his household, covered over round sums to Celia's separate banking account, upon the mere playful hint of her holding her cheque-book up, without a dream of questioning her.

That the stepmother had joy, or indeed anything but gall and wormwood, out of all this is not to be pretended. There lingered along in the recollection of the family some vague memories of her having tried to assert an authority over Celia's comings and goings at the outset, but they grouped themselves as features of the general disorder of moving and settling, which a fortnight or so quite righted. Mrs. Madden still permitted herself a certain license of hostile comment when her stepdaughter was not present, and listened with gratification to what the women of her acquaintance ventured upon saying in the same spirit, but actual interference or remonstrance she never offered nowadays. The two rarely met, for that matter, and exchanged only the baldest and curtest forms of speech.

Celia Madden interested all Octavius deeply. This

she must have done in any case, if only because she was the only daughter of its richest citizen. But the bold, luxuriant quality of her beauty, the original and piquant freedom of her manners, the stories told in gossip about her lawlessness at home, her intellectual attainments and artistic vagaries—these were even more exciting. The unlikelihood of her marrying anyone—at least any Octavian—was felt to add a certain romantic zest to the image she made on the local perceptions. There was no visible young Irishman at all approaching the social and financial standard of the Maddens; it was taken for granted that a mixed marriage was quite out of the question in this case. She seemed to have more business about the church than even the priest. She was always playing the organ, or drilling the choir, or decorating the altars with flowers, or looking over the robes of the acolytes for rents and stains, or going in or out of the pastorate. Clearly this was not the sort of girl to take a Protestant husband.

The gossip of the town concerning her was, however, exclusively Protestant. The Irish spoke of her, even among themselves, but seldom. There was no occasion for them to pretend to like her: they did not know her except in the most distant and formal fashion. Even the members of the choir, of both sexes, had the sense of being held away from her at haughty arm's-length.

No single parishioner dreamed of calling her friend. But when they referred to her, it was always with a cautious and respectful reticence. For one thing, she was the daughter of their chief man, the man they most esteemed and loved. For another, reservations they may have had in their souls about her touched close upon a delicately sore spot. It could not escape their notice that their Protestant neighbours were watching her with vigilant curiosity, and with a certain tendency to wink when her name came into conversation along with that of Father Forbes. It had never yet got beyond a tendency—the barest fluttering suggestion of a tempted eyelid—but the whole Irish population of the place felt themselves to be waiting, with clenched fists but sinking hearts, for the wink itself.

The Rev. Theron Ware had not caught even the faintest hint of these overtures to suspicion.

When he had entered the huge, dark, cool vault of the church, he could see nothing at first but a faint light up over the gallery, far at the other end. Then, little by little, his surroundings shaped themselves out of the gloom. To his right was a rail and some broad steps rising toward a softly confused mass of little grey vertical bars, and the pale twinkle of tiny spots of gilded reflection, which he made out in the dusk to be the candles and trappings of the altar. Overhead the great arches faded away from foundations of dimly discernible

capitals into utter blackness. There was a strange medicinal odour as of asthma-cigarettes in the air.

After a little pause, he tiptoed noiselessly up the side aisle toward the end of the church—toward the light above the gallery. This radiance from a single gas-jet expanded as he advanced, and spread itself upward over a burnished row of monster metal pipes, which went towering into the darkness like giants. They were roaring at him now—a sonorous, deafening, angry bellow, which made everything about him vibrate. The gallery balustrade hid the keyboard and the organist from view. There were only these jostling brazen tubes, as big round as trees and as tall, trembling with their own furious thunder. It was for all the world as if he had wandered into some vast, tragical, enchanted cave, and was being drawn against his will, like fascinated bird to python, toward fate at the savage hands of these swollen and enraged genii.

He stumbled in the obscure light over a kneeling-bench, making a considerable racket. On the instant the noise from the organ ceased, and he saw the black figure of a woman rise above the gallery-rail and look down.

“Who is it?” the indubitable voice of Miss Madden demanded sharply.

Theron had a sudden sheepish notion of turning and

running. With the best grace he could summon, he called out an explanation instead.

"Wait a minute. I'm through now. I'm coming down," she returned. He thought there was a note of amusement in her tone.

She came to him a moment later, accompanied by a thin, tall man, whom Theron could barely see in the dark, now that the organ light, too, was gone. This man struck a match or two to enable them to make their way out.

When they were on the side-walk Celia spoke. "Walk on ahead, Michael," she said. "I have some matters to speak of with Mr. Ware."

CHAPTER X.

“WELL, what did you think of Dr. Ledsmar?”

The girl's abrupt question came as a relief to Theron. They were walking along in a darkness so nearly complete that he could see next to nothing of his companion. For some reason, this seemed to suggest a sort of impropriety. He had listened to the footsteps of the man ahead, whom he guessed to be a servant, and pictured him as intent upon getting up early next morning to tell everybody that the Methodist minister had stolen into the Catholic church at night to walk home with Miss Madden. That was going to be very awkward; yes, worse than awkward. It might mean ruin itself. She had mentioned aloud that she had matters to talk over with him; that of course implied confidences, and the man might put Heaven only knew what construction on that. It was notorious that servants did ascribe the very worst motives to those they worked for. The bare thought of the delight an Irish servant would have in also dragging a Protestant clergyman into the thing was sickening. And what could she want to

talk to him about, any way? The minute of silence stretched itself out upon his nerves into an interminable period of anxious unhappiness. Her mention of the Doctor at last somehow seemed to lighten the situation.

"Oh, I thought he was very smart," he made haste to answer. "Wouldn't it be better—to—keep close to your man? He—may—think we've gone some other way."

"It wouldn't matter if he did," remarked Celia. She appeared to comprehend his nervousness, and take pity on it, for she added, "It is my brother Michael, as good a soul as ever lived. He is quite used to my ways."

The Rev. Mr. Ware drew a long comforting breath. "Oh, I see! He went with you to—bring you home."

"To blow the organ," said the girl in the dark, correctingly. "But about that Doctor—did you like him?"

"Well," Theron began, "'like' is rather a strong word for so short an acquaintance. He talked very well—that is, fluently. But he is so different from any other man I have come into contact with, that——"

"What I wanted you to say was that you hated him," put in Celia firmly.

"I don't make a practice of saying that of anybody," returned Theron, so much at his ease again that he put

an effect of gentle, smiling reproof into the words. "And why specially should I make an exception for him?"

"Because he's a beast!"

Theron fancied that he understood. "I noticed that he seemed not to have much of an ear for music," he commented, with a little laugh. "He shut down the window when you began to play. His doing so annoyed me, because I—I wanted very much to hear it all. I never heard such music before. I—I came into the church to hear more of it, but then you stopped."

"I will play for you some other time," Celia said, answering the regret in his tone. "But to-night I wanted to talk with you instead."

She kept silent, in spite of this, so long now that Theron was on the point of jestingly asking when the talk was to begin. Then she put a question abruptly:

"It is a conventional way of putting it, but are you fond of poetry, Mr. Ware?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I am," replied Theron, much mystified. "I can't say that I am any great judge—but I like the things that I like—and——"

"Meredith," interposed Celia, "makes one of his women, Emilia in England, say that poetry is like talking on tiptoe; like animals in cages, always going to one end and back again. Does it impress you that way?"

"I don't know that it does," said he dubiously. It seemed, however, to be her whim to talk literature, and he went on: "I've hardly read Meredith at all. I once borrowed his 'Lucile,' but somehow I never got interested in it. I heard a recitation of his once, though, a piece about a dead wife, and the husband and another man quarrelling as to whose portrait was in the locket on her neck, and of their going up to settle the dispute, and finding that it was the likeness of a third man, a young priest; and though it was very striking, it didn't give me a thirst to know his other poems. I fancied I shouldn't like them. But I dare say I was wrong. As I get older I find that I take less narrow views of literature—that is, of course, of light literature—and that, that——"

Celia mercifully stopped him. "The reason I asked you was——" she began, and then herself paused. "Or no, never mind that; tell me something else. Are you fond of pictures, statuary, the beautiful things of the world? Do great works of art, the big achievements of the big artists, appeal to you, stir you up?"

"Alas! that is something I can only guess at myself," answered Theron humbly. "I have always lived in little places. I suppose, from your point of view, I have never seen a good painting in my life. I can only say this, though, that it has always weighed on my mind as a great and sore deprivation, this being shut out from knowing what others mean when they talk and write

about art. Perhaps that may help you to get at what you are after. If I ever went to New York, I feel that one of the first things I should do would be to see all the picture galleries; is that what you meant? And—would you mind telling me—why you——”

“Why I asked you?” Celia supplied his halting question. “No, I *don't* mind. I have a reason for wanting to know—to satisfy myself whether I had guessed rightly or not—about the kind of man you are. I mean in the matter of temperament and bent of mind and tastes.”

The girl seemed to be speaking seriously, and without intent to offend. Theron did not find any comment ready, but walked along by her side, wondering much what it was all about.

“I dare say you think me ‘too familiar on short acquaintance,’” she continued, after a little.

“My dear Miss Madden!” he protested perfunctorily.

“No; it is a matter of a good deal of importance,” she went on. “I can see that you are going to be thrown into friendship—close contact—with Father Forbes. He likes you, and you can't help liking him. There is nobody else in this raw, overgrown, empty-headed place for you and him *to* like—nobody except that man, that Dr. Ledsmar. And if you like *him* I shall hate you! He has done mischief enough already.

I am counting on you to help undo it, and to choke him off from doing more. It would be different if you were an ordinary orthodox minister, all encased like a terrapin in prejudices and nonsense. Of course, if you had been *that* kind, we should never have got to know you at all. But when I saw you in MacEvoy's cottage there, it was plain that you were one of *us*—I mean a *man*, and not a marionette or a mummy. I am talking very frankly to you, you see. I want you on my side—against that Doctor, and his heartless, bloodless science.”

“I feel myself very heartily on your side,” replied Theron. She had set their progress at a slower pace, now that the lights of the main street were drawing near, as if to prolong their talk. All his earlier reservations had fled. It was almost as if she were a parishioner of his own. “I need hardly tell you that the Doctor's whole attitude toward—toward Revelation—was deeply repugnant to me. It doesn't make it any the less hateful to call it science. I am afraid, though,” he went on hesitatingly, “that there are difficulties in the way of my helping, as you call it. You see, the very fact of my being a Methodist minister, and his being a Catholic priest, rather puts my interference out of the question.”

“No, that doesn't matter a button,” said Celia lightly. “None of us think of that at all.”

"There is the other embarrassment, then," pursued Theron diffidently, "that Father Forbes is a vastly broader and deeper scholar in all these matters than I am. How could I possibly hope to influence him by my poor arguments? I don't know even the alphabet of the language he thinks in—on these subjects, I mean."

"Of course you don't," interposed the girl, with a confidence which the other, for all his meekness, rather winced under. "That wasn't what I meant at all. We don't want arguments from our friends; we want sympathies, sensibilities, emotional bonds. The right person's silence is worth more for companionship than the wisest talk in the world from anybody else. It isn't your mind that is needed here, or what you know; it is your heart, and what you feel. You are full of poetry—of ideals—of generous, unselfish impulses. You see the human, the warm-blooded side of things. *That* is what is really valuable. *That* is how you can help."

"You overestimate me sadly," protested Theron, though with considerable tolerance for her error in his tone. "But you ought to tell me something about this Dr. Ledsmar. He spoke of being an old friend of the pr—of Father Forbes."

"Oh yes, they've always known each other—that is, for many years. They were professors together in a college once, Heaven only knows how long ago. Then

they separated; I fancy they quarrelled, too, before they parted. The Doctor came here, where some relative had left him the place he lives in. Then in time the Bishop chanced to send Father Forbes here—that was about three years ago—and the two men after a while renewed their old relations. They dine together—that is the Doctor's stronghold. He knows more about eating than any other man alive, I believe. He studies it, as you would study a language. He has taught old Maggie, at the pastorate there, to cook like the mother of all the Delmonicos. And while they sit and stuff themselves, or loll about afterward, like gorged snakes, they think it is smart to laugh at all the sweet and beautiful things in life, and to sneer at people who believe in ideals, and to talk about mankind being merely a fortuitous product of fermentation, and twaddle of that sort. It makes me sick!"

"I can readily see," said Theron, with sympathy, "how such a cold, material, and infidel influence as that must shock and revolt an essentially religious temperament like yours."

Miss Madden looked up at him. They had turned into Main Street, and there was light enough for him to detect something startlingly like a grin on her beautiful face.

"But I'm not religious at all, you know," he heard

her say. "I'm as pagan as—anything! Of course there are forms to be observed, and so on. I rather like them than otherwise. I can make them serve very well for my own system, for I am myself, you know, an out-and-out Greek."

"Why, I had supposed that you were full-blooded Irish," the Rev. Mr. Ware found himself remarking, and then on the instant was overwhelmed by the consciousness that he had said a foolish thing. Precisely where the folly lay he did not know, but it was impossible to mistake the gesture of annoyance which his companion had instinctively made at his words. She had widened the distance between them now, and quickened her step. They went on in silence till they were within a block of her house. Several people had passed them who, Theron felt sure, must have recognised them both.

"What I meant was," the girl all at once began, drawing nearer again, and speaking with patient slowness, "that I find myself much more in sympathy with the Greek thought, the Greek theology of the beautiful and the strong, the Greek philosophy of life, and all that, than what is taught nowadays. Personally, I take much more stock in Plato than I do in Peter. But of course it is a wholly personal affair; I had no business to bother you with it. And, for that matter, I oughtn't to have troubled you with any of our——"

"I assure you, Miss Madden——" the young minister began with fervour.

"No," she broke in, in a resigned and even down-cast tone; "let it all be as if I hadn't spoken. Don't mind anything I have said. If it is to be, it will be. You can't say more than that, can you?"

She looked into his face again, and her large eyes produced an impression of deep melancholy, which Theron found himself somehow impelled to share. Things seemed all at once to have become very sad indeed.

"It is one of my unhappy nights," she explained in gloomy confidence. "I get them every once in a while, as if some vicious planet or other was crossing in front of my good star, and then I'm a caution to snakes. I shut myself up—that's the only thing to do—and have it out with myself. I didn't know but the organ music would calm me down, but it hasn't. I shan't sleep a wink to-night, but just rage around from one room to another, piling all the cushions from the divans on to the floor, and then kicking them away again. Do *you* ever have fits like that?"

Theron was able to reply with a good conscience in the negative. It occurred to him to add, with jocose intent, "I am curious to know: do these fits, as you call them, occupy a prominent part in Grecian philosophy as a general rule?"

Celia gave a little snort, which might have signified amusement, but did not speak until they were upon her own side-walk. "There is my brother, waiting at the gate," she said then briefly.

"Well, then, I will bid you good-night here, I think," Theron remarked, coming to a halt and offering his hand. "It must be getting very late, and my—that is—I have to be up particularly early to-morrow. So good-night; I hope you will be feeling ever so much better in spirits in the morning."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," replied the girl listlessly. "It's a very paltry little affair, this life of ours, at the best of it. Luckily it's soon done with—like a bad dream."

"Tut, tut! I won't have you talk like that!" interrupted Theron, with a swift and smart assumption of authority. "Such talk isn't sensible, and it isn't good. I have no patience with it!"

"Well, try and have a little patience with *me*, any way, just for to-night," said Celia, taking the reproof with gentlest humility, rather to her censor's surprise. "I really am unhappy to-night, Mr. Ware, very unhappy. It seems as if all at once the world had swelled out in size a thousandfold, and that poor me had dwindled down to the merest wee, little red-headed atom—the

most helpless and forlorn and lonesome of atoms at that." She seemed to force a sorrowful smile on her face as she added, "But, all the same, it has done me good to be with you—I am sure it has—and I dare say that by to-morrow I shall be quite out of the blues. Good-night, Mr. Ware. Forgive my making such an exhibition of myself. I *was* going to be such a fine early Greek, you know, and I have turned out only a late Milesian—quite of the decadence. I shall do better next time. And good-night again, and ever so many thanks."

She was walking briskly away toward the gate now, where the shadowy Michael still patiently stood. Theron strode off in the opposite direction, taking long deliberate steps and bowing his head in thought. He had his hands behind his back, as was his wont, and the sense of their recent contact with her firm, ungloved hands was, curiously enough, the thing which pushed itself uppermost in his mind. There had been a frank, almost manly, vigour in her grasp. He said to himself that, of course, that came from her playing so much on the keyboard; the exercise naturally would give her large, robust hands.

Suddenly he remembered about the piano; he had quite forgotten to solicit her aid in selecting it. He turned upon the impulse to go back. She had not entered the gate as yet, but stood, shinningly visible under the street lamp, on the side-walk, and she was

looking in his direction. He turned again like a shot and started homeward.

The front-door of the parsonage was unlocked, and he made his way on tiptoe through the unlighted hall to the living-room. The stuffy air here was almost suffocating with the evil smell of a kerosene lamp turned down too low. Alice sat asleep in her old farmhouse rocking-chair, with an inelegant darning-basket on the table by her side. The whole effect of the room was as bare and squalid to Theron's newly informed eye as the atmosphere was offensive to his nostrils. He coughed sharply, and his wife sat up and looked at the clock. It was after eleven.

"Where on earth have you been?" she asked, with a yawn, turning up the wick of the lamp again.

"If you will sew by a lamp instead of the gas, you ought never to turn it down," said Theron, with a complaining note in his voice. "It smells up the whole place. I never dreamt of your sitting up for me like this. You ought to have gone to bed."

"But how could I guess that you were going to be so late?" she retorted. "And you haven't told me where you were. Is this book of yours going to keep you up like this right along?"

The episode of the book was buried in the young minister's mind beneath such a mass of subsequent ex-

periences that it required an effort for him to grasp what she was talking about. It seemed as if months had elapsed since he was in earnest about that book, and yet he had left the house full of it only a few hours before. He shook his wits together, and made answer:

“Oh, bless you, no! Only there arose a very curious question—you have no idea, literally no conception, of the interesting and important problems which are raised by the mere fact of Abraham leaving the city of Ur. It’s amazing, I assure you. I hadn’t realised it myself.”

“Well,” remarked Alice, rising, and with good humour and petulance struggling sleepily in her tone, “all I’ve got to say is, that if Abraham hasn’t anything better to do than to keep young ministers of the gospel out goodness knows where till all hours of the night, he might much better have stayed in the city of Ur, right straight along.”

“You have no idea what a scholarly man Dr. Ledsmar is,” Theron suddenly found himself inspired to volunteer. “He has the most marvellous collection of books—a whole library devoted to this very subject, and he has put them all quite freely at my disposal—extremely kind of him, isn’t it?”

“Ledsmar? Ledsmar?” queried Alice. “I don’t seem to remember the name. He isn’t the little man with the birth-mark who sits in the pew behind the

Lovejoys, is he? I think some one said *he* was a doctor."

"Yes, a horse doctor!" said Theron, with a sniff. "No, you haven't seen this Dr. Ledsmar at all. I—I don't know that he attends *any* church regularly. I scraped his acquaintance quite by accident. He is really a character. He lives in the big house, just beyond the racecourse, you know—the one with the tower at the back——"

"No, I *don't* know. How should I? I've hardly poked my nose outside of the yard since I've been here."

"Well, you shall go," said the husband consolingly. "You *have* been cooped up here too much, poor girl. I must take you out more, really. I don't know that I could take you to the Doctor's place, though—without an invitation, I mean. He is a trifle queer about some things. He lives there all alone, for instance, with only a Chinaman for a servant. He told me I was almost the only man he had asked under his roof for years. He isn't a practising physician at all, you know. He is a scientist; he makes experiments with lizards—and things."

"Theron," the wife said, pausing lamp in hand on the way to the bedroom. "Do you be careful, now! For all you know this Doctor may be a loose man—or pretty near an infidel. You've got to be mighty parti-

cular in such matters, you know, or you'll have the trustees down on you like a thousand of brick."

"I will thank the trustees to mind their own business," said Theron stiffly, and the subject dropped.

The bedroom window upstairs was open, and upon the fresh night air was borne in the shrill jangling sound of a piano being played off somewhere in the distance, but so vehemently that the noise imposed itself upon the silence far and wide. Theron listened to this as he undressed. It proceeded from the direction of the main street, and he knew as by instinct that it was the Madden girl who was playing. The incongruity of the hour escaped his notice. He mused instead upon the wild and tropical tangle of moods, emotions, passions, which had grown up in that strange temperament. He found something very pathetic in that picture she had drawn of herself in forecast, roaming disconsolate through her rooms the livelong night, unable to sleep. The woeful moan of insomnia seemed to make itself heard in every strain from her piano.

Alice heard it also, but, being unillumined, she missed the romantic pathos. "I call it disgraceful," she muttered from her pillow, "for folks to be banging away on a piano at this time of night. There ought to be a law to prevent it."

"It may be some distressed soul," said Theron gently, "seeking relief from the curse of sleeplessness."

The wife laughed, almost contemptuously. "Distressed fiddlesticks!" was her only other comment.

The music went on for a long time, rising now to strident heights, now sinking off to the merest tinkling murmur, and broken ever and again by intervals of utter hush. It did not prevent Alice from at once falling sound asleep, but Theron lay awake, it seemed to him for hours, listening tranquilly, and letting his mind wander at will through the pleasant ante-chambers of sleep, where are more unreal fantasies than dreamland itself affords.

PART II.

11-14-19

CHAPTER XI.

FOR some weeks the Rev. Theron Ware saw nothing of either the priest and the Doctor, or the interesting Miss Madden.

There were, indeed, more urgent matters to think about. June had come, and every succeeding day brought closer to hand the ordeal of his first Quarterly Conference in Octavius. The waters distinctly grew rougher as his pastoral bark neared this difficult passage.

He would have approached the great event with an easier mind if he could have made out just how he stood with his congregation. Unfortunately nothing in his previous experiences helped him in the least to measure or guess at the feelings of these curious Octavians. Their Methodism seemed to be sound enough, and to stick quite to the letter of the Discipline, so long as it was expressed in formulæ. It was its spirit which he felt to be complicated by all sorts of conditions wholly novel to him.

The existence of a line of tram-cars in the town, for example, would not impress the casual thinker as likely to prove a rock in the path of revealed religion. Theron, in his simplicity, had even thought, when he first saw these bob-tailed cars bumping along the rails in the middle of the main street, that they must be a great convenience to people living in the outskirts who wished to get in to church on a Sunday morning. He was imprudent enough to mention this in conversation with one of his new parishioners. Then he learned, to his considerable chagrin, that when this line was built, some years before, a bitter war of words had been fought upon the question of its being worked on the Sabbath-day. The then occupant of the Methodist pulpit had so distinguished himself above the rest by the solemnity and fervour of his protests against this insolent desecration of God's day that the Methodists of Octavius still felt themselves peculiarly bound to hold this horse-car line, its management, and everything connected with it, in unbending aversion. At least once a year they were accustomed to expect a sermon denouncing it and all its impious Sunday patrons. Theron made a mental resolve that this year they should be disappointed.

Another burning problem, which he had not been called upon before to confront, he found now entangled with the mysterious line which divided a circus from a menagerie. Those itinerant tent-shows had never come

his way heretofore, and he knew nothing of that fine balancing proportion between ladies in tights on horse-back and cages full of deeply educational animals which, even as the impartial rain, was designed to embrace alike the just and the unjust. There had arisen inside the Methodist society of Octavius some painful episodes, connected with members who took their children "just to see the animals," and were convicted of having also watched the Rose-Queen of the arena, in her unequalled flying leap through eight hoops, with an ardent and unashamed eye. One of these cases still remained on the censorial docket of the church, and Theron understood that he was expected to name a committee of five to examine and try it. This he neglected to do.

He was no longer so certain that the congregation as a whole liked his sermons. The truth was, no doubt, that he had learned enough to cease regarding the congregation as a whole. He could still rely upon carrying along with him in his discourses from the pulpit a large majority of interested and approving faces. But here, unhappily, was a case where the majority did not rule. The minority, relatively small in numbers, was prodigious in virile force.

More than twenty years had now elapsed since that minor schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the result of which was the independent body known as Free Methodists, had relieved the parent flock of its

principal disturbing element. The rupture came fittingly at that time when all the "isms" of the argumentative 'fifties were hurled violently together into the melting-pot of civil war. The great Methodist Church, South, had broken bodily off on the question of State Rights. The smaller and domestic fraction of Free Methodism separated itself upon an issue which may be most readily described as one of civilisation. The seceders resented growth in material prosperity; they repudiated the introduction of written sermons and organ music; they deplored the increasing laxity in meddlesome piety, the introduction of polite manners in the pulpit and classroom, and the development of even a rudimentary desire among the younger people of the church to be like others outside in dress and speech and deportment. They did battle as long as they could, inside the fold, to restore it to the severely straight and narrow path of primitive Methodism. When the adverse odds became too strong for them, they quitted the Church and set up a Bethel for themselves.

Octavius chanced to be one of the places where they were able to hold their own within the Church organisation. The Methodism of the town had gone along without any local secession. It still held in full fellowship the radicals who elsewhere followed their unbridled bent into the strongest emotional vagaries, where excited brethren worked themselves up in epileptic fits, and

women whirled themselves about in weird religious ecstasies, like dervishes of the Orient, till they fell headlong in a state of trance. Octavian Methodism was spared extravagances of this sort, it is true, but it paid a price for the immunity. The people whom an open split would have taken away remained to leaven and dominate the whole lump. This small advanced section, with its men of a type all the more aggressive from its narrowness, and women who went about solemnly in plain grey garments, with tight-fitting, unadorned, mouse-coloured sun-bonnets, had not been able wholly to enforce its views upon the social life of the church members, but of its controlling influence upon their official and public actions there could be no doubt.

The situation had begun to unfold itself to Theron from the outset. He had recognised the episodes of the forbidden Sunday milk, and of the flowers in poor Alice's bonnet, as typical of much more that was to come. No week followed without bringing some new fulfilment of this foreboding. Now, at the end of two months, he knew well enough that the hitherto dominant minority was hostile to him and his ministry, and would do whatever it could against him.

Though Theron at once decided to show fight, and did not at all waver in that resolve, his courage was in the main of a despondent sort. Sometimes it would flutter up to the point of confidence, or at least hope-

fulness, when he met with substantial men of the church who obviously liked him, and whom he found himself mentally ranging on his side, in the struggle which was to come. But more often it was blankly apparent to him that, the moment flags were flying and drums on the roll, these amiable fair-weather friends would probably take to their heels.

Still, such as they were, his sole hope lay in their support. He must make the best of them. He set himself doggedly to the task of gathering together all those who were not his enemies into what, when the proper time came, should be known as the pastor's party. There was plenty of apostolic warrant for this. If there had not been, Theron felt that the mere elementary demands of self-defence would have justified his use of strategy.

The institution of pastoral calling, particularly that inquisitorial form of it laid down in the Discipline, had never attracted Theron. He and Alice had gone about among their previous flocks in quite a haphazard fashion, without thought of system, much less of deliberate purpose. Theron made lists now, and devoted thought and examination to the personal tastes and characteristics of the people to be cultivated. There were some, for example, who would expect him to talk pretty much as the Discipline ordained—that is, to ask if they had family prayer, to inquire after their souls, and to generally

minister grace to his hearers; and these in turn subdivided themselves into classes, ranging from those who would wish nothing else to those who needed only a mild spiritual flavour. There were others whom he would please much better by not talking shop at all. Although he could ill afford it, he subscribed now for a daily paper, that he might have a perpetually renewed source of good conversational topics for these more worldly calls. He also bought several pounds of sweets, pleasing in colour, but warranted to be entirely harmless, and he made a large mysterious mark on the inside of his new silk hat to remind him not to go out calling without some of these in his pocket for the children.

Alice, he felt, was not helping him in this matter as effectively as he could have wished. Her attitude toward the church in Octavius might best be described by the word sulky. Great allowance was to be made, he realised, for her humiliation over the flowers in her bonnet. That might justify her, fairly enough, in being kept away from meeting now and again by headaches or undefined megrims; but it ought not to prevent her from going about and making friends among the kindlier parishioners who would welcome such a thing, and whom he from time to time indicated to her. She did go to some extent, it is true, but she produced, in doing so, an effect of performing a duty. He did not find traces any-

where of her having created a brilliant social impression. When they went out together, he was peculiarly conscious of having to do the work unaided.

This was not at all like the Alice of former years, of other charges. Why, she had been, beyond comparison, the most popular young woman in Tyre. What possessed her to mope like this in Octavius?

Theron looked at her attentively nowadays, when she was unaware of his gaze, to see if her face offered any answer to the riddle. It could not be suggested that she was ill. Never in her life had she been looking so well. She had thrown herself, all at once, and with what was to him an unaccountable energy, into the creation and management of a flower-garden. She was out the better part of every day, rain or shine, digging, transplanting, pruning, pottering generally about among her plants and shrubs. This work in the open air had given her an aspect of physical well-being which it was impossible to be mistaken about.

Her husband was glad, of course, that she had found some occupation which at once pleased her and so obviously conduced to health. This was so much a matter of course, in fact, that he said to himself over and over again that he *was* glad. Only—only, sometimes the thought *would* force itself upon his attention that if she did not spend so much of her time in her own garden, she would have more time to devote to winning friends

for them in the Garden of the Lord—friends whom they were going to need badly.

The young minister, in taking anxious stock of the chances for and against him, turned over often in his mind the fact that he had already won rank as a pulpit orator. His sermons had attracted almost universal attention at Tyre, and his achievement before the Conference at Tecumseh, if it did fail to receive practical reward, had admittedly distanced all the other preaching there. It was a part of the evil luck pursuing him that here, in this perversely enigmatic Octavius, his special gift seemed to be of no use whatever. There were times, indeed, when he was tempted to think that bad preaching was what Octavius wanted.

Somewhere he had heard of a Presbyterian minister, in charge of a big city church, who managed to keep well in with a watchfully orthodox congregation, and at the same time establish himself in the affections of the community at large, simply by preaching two kinds of sermons. In the morning, when almost all who attended were his own communicants, he gave them very cautious and edifying doctrinal discourses, treading loyally in the path of the Westminster Confession. To the evening assemblages, made up for the larger part of outsiders, he addressed broadly liberal sermons, literary in form, and full of respectful allusions to modern science and the philosophy of the day. Thus he filled the church

at both services, and put money in its treasury and his own fame before the world. There was, of course, the obvious danger that the pious elders, who in the forenoon heard infant damnation vigorously proclaimed, would revolt when they heard after supper that there was some doubt about even adults being damned at all. But either because the same people didn't attend both services, or because the minister's perfect regularity in the morning was each week regarded as a retractation of his latest vagaries of an evening, no trouble ever came.

Theron had somewhat tentatively tried this on in Octavius. It was no good. His parishioners were of the sort who would have come to church eight times a day on Sunday, instead of two, if occasion offered. The hope that even a portion of them would stop away, and that their places would be taken in the evening by less prejudiced strangers who wished for intellectual rather than theological food, fell by the wayside. The yearned-for strangers did not come; the familiar faces of the morning service all turned up in their accustomed places every evening. They were faces which confused and disheartened Theron in the daytime. Under the gas-light they seemed even harder and more unsympathetic. He timorously experimented with them for an evening or two, then abandoned the effort.

Once there had seemed the beginning of a chance. The richest banker in Octavius—a fat, sensual, hog-

faced old bachelor—surprised everybody one evening by entering the church and taking a seat. Theron happened to know who he was; even if he had not known, the suppressed excitement visible in the congregation, the way the sisters turned round to look, the way the more important brethren put their heads together and exchanged furtive whispers, would have warned him that big game was in view. He recalled afterward with something like self-disgust the eager, almost tremulous, pains he himself took to please this banker. There was a part of the sermon, as it had been written out, which easily might give offence to a single man of wealth and free notions of life. With the alertness of a mental gymnast Theron ran ahead, excised this portion, and had ready when the gap was reached some very pretty general remarks, all the more effective and eloquent, he felt, for having been extemporised. People said it was a good sermon, and after the benediction and dispersion some of the officials and principal pew-holders remained to talk over the likelihood of a capture having been effected. Theron did not get away without having this mentioned to him, and he was conscious of sharing deeply the hope of the brethren, with the added reflection that it would be a personal triumph for himself into the bargain. He was ashamed of this feeling a little later, and of his trick with the sermon. But this chastening product of introspection was all the fruit

which the incident bore. The banker never came again.

Theron returned one afternoon, a little earlier than usual, from a group of pastoral calls. Alice, who was plucking weeds in a border at the shady side of the house, heard his step, and rose from her labours. He was walking slowly, and seemed weary. He took off his high hat as he saw her and wiped his brow. The broiling June sun was still high overhead. Doubtless it was its insufferable heat which was accountable for the worn lines in his face and the spiritless air which the wife's eye detected. She went to the gate, and kissed him as he entered.

"I believe, if I were you," she said, "I'd carry an umbrella such scorching days as this. Nobody 'd think anything of it. I don't see why a minister shouldn't carry one as much as a woman carries a parasol."

Theron gave her a rueful, meditative sort of smile. "I suppose people really do think of us as a kind of hybrid female," he remarked. Then, holding his hat in his hand, he drew a long breath of relief at finding himself in the shade, and looked about him.

"Why, you've got more posies here, on this one side of the house alone, than mother had in her whole yard," he said after a little. "Let's see—I know that one; that's columbine, isn't it? And that's London

pride, and that's ragged robin. I don't know any of the others."

Alice recited various unfamiliar names as she pointed out the several plants which bore them, and he listened with a kindly semblance of interest. They strolled thus to the rear of the house, where thick clumps of fragrant pinks lined both sides of the path. She picked some of these for him, and gave him more names with which to label the considerable number of other plants he saw about him.

"I had no idea we were so well provided as all this," he commented at last. "Those Van Sizers must have been tremendous hands for flowers. You were lucky in following such people."

"Van Sizers!" echoed Alice, with contempt. "All they left was old tomato-cans and clam-shells. Why, I've put in every blessed one of these myself, all except those peonies there, and one briar on the side wall."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Theron approvingly. Then it occurred to him to ask, "But where did you get them all? Around among our friends?"

"Some few," responded Alice, with a note of hesitation in her voice. "Sister Bult gave me the verbenas there, and the white pinks were a present from Miss Stevens. But most of them Levi Gorringer was good enough to send me—from his garden."

"I didn't know that Gorringer had a garden," said Theron. "I thought he lived over his law office, in the brick block, there."

"Well, I don't know that it's exactly *his*," explained Alice, "but it's a big garden somewhere outside, where he can have anything he likes." She went on with a little laugh: "I didn't like to question him too closely, for fear he'd think I was looking a gift horse in the mouth, or else hinting for more. It was quite his own offer, you know. He picked them all out for me, and brought them here, and lent me a book telling me just what to do with each one. And in a day or two now I am to have another big batch of plants—dahlias and zinnias and asters, and so on. I'm almost ashamed to take them; but it's such a change to find some one in this narrow-contracted Octavius who isn't all self!"

"Yes, Gorringer is a good fellow," said Theron. "I wish he was a professing member." Then some new thought struck him. "Alice," he exclaimed, "I believe I'll go and see him this very afternoon. I don't know why it hasn't occurred to me before; he's just the man whose advice I need most. He knows these people here; he can tell me what to do."

"Aren't you too tired now?" suggested Alice, as Theron put on his hat.

"No; the sooner the better," he replied, moving now toward the gate.

"Well," she began, "if I were you, I wouldn't say too much about—that is, I—but never mind."

"What is it?" asked her husband.

"Nothing whatever," replied Alice positively. "It was only some nonsense of mine;" and Theron, placidly accepting the feminine whim, went off down the street again.

CHAPTER XII.

THE Rev. Mr. Ware found Levi Gorringer's law office readily enough, but its owner was not in. He probably would be back again, though, in a quarter of an hour or so, the boy said, and the minister at once decided to wait.

Theron was interested in finding that this office-boy was no other than Harvey, the lad who brought milk to the parsonage every morning. He remembered now that he had heard good things of this urchin, as to the hard work he did to help his mother, the Widow Semple, in her struggle to keep a roof over her head; and also bad things, in that he did not come regularly to either church or Sunday-school. The clergyman recalled, too, that Harvey had impressed him as a character.

"Well, sonny, are you going to be a lawyer?" he asked, as he seated himself by the window and looked about him, first at the dusty litter of old papers, pamphlets, and tape-bound documents in bundles which crowded the stuffy chamber, and then at the boy himself.

Harvey was busy at a big box—a rough pine pack-

ing case which bore the flaring label of an express company, and also of a well-known seed firm in a western city, and which the boy had apparently just opened. He was lifting from it, and placing on the table after he had taken off the papers and moist moss in which they were packed, small parcels of what looked in the fading light to be wilted plants.

"Well, I don't know; I rather guess not," he made answer, as he pursued his task. "So far as I can make out, this wouldn't be the place to start in, if I *was* going to be a lawyer. A boy can learn here first rate how to load cartridges and clean a gun, and braid trout-flies on to leaders, but I don't see much law laying around loose. Any way," he went on, "I couldn't afford to read law, and not be getting any wages. I have to earn money, you know."

Theron felt that he liked the boy. "Yes," he said, with a kindly tone, "I've heard that you are a good, industrious youngster. I dare say Mr. Gorringer will see to it that you get a chance to read law, and get wages too."

"Oh, I can read all there is here and welcome," the boy explained, stepping toward the window to decipher the label on a bundle of roots in his hand, "but that's no good unless there's regular practice coming into the office all the while. *That's* how you learn to be a lawyer. But Gorringer don't have what I call a practice

at all. He just sees men in the other room there, with the door shut, and whatever there is to do he does it all himself."

The minister remembered a stray hint somewhere that Mr. Gorringer was a money-lender—what was colloquially called "a note-shaver." To his rustic sense, there was something not quite nice about that occupation. It would be indecorous, he felt, to encourage further talk about it from the boy.

"What are you doing there?" he inquired, to change the subject.

"Sorting out some plants," replied Harvey. "I don't know what's got into Gorringer lately. This is the third big box he's had since I've been here—that is, in six weeks—besides two baskets full of rose-bushes. I don't know what he does with them. He carries them off himself somewhere. I've had kind of half a notion that he's figurin' on getting married. I can't think of anything else that would make a man spend money like water—just for flowers and bushes. They do get foolish, you know, when they've got marriage on the brain."

Theron found himself only imperfectly following the theories of the young philosopher. It was his facts which monopolised the minister's attention.

"But, as I understand it," he remarked hesitatingly, "Brother Gorringer—or rather Mr. Gorringer—gets all the

plants he wants, everything he likes, from a big garden somewhere outside, near by. I don't know that it is exactly *his*, but I remember hearing something to that effect."

The boy slapped the last litter off his hands and, as he came to the window, shook his head. "These don't come from no garden outside," he declared; "they come from the dealers', and he pays solid cash for 'em. The invoice for this lot alone was \$31.60. There it is on the table; you can see it for yourself."

Mr. Ware did not offer to look. "Very likely these are *for* the garden I was speaking of," he said. "Of course you can't go on taking plants out of a garden indefinitely without putting others in."

"I don't know anything about any garden that he takes plants *out* of," answered Harvey, and looked meditatively for a minute or two out upon the street below. Then he turned to the minister: "Your wife's doing a good deal of gardening this spring, I notice," he said casually; "you'd hardly think it was the same place, she's fixed it up so. If she wants any extra hoeing done, I can always get off Saturday afternoons."

"I will remember," said Theron. He also looked out of the window, and nothing more was said until, a few moments later, Mr. Gorringer himself came in.

The lawyer seemed both surprised and pleased at discovering the identity of his visitor, with whom he

shook hands in almost an excess of cordiality. He spread a large newspaper over the pile of seedling plants on the table, pushed the packing-box under the table with his foot, and said almost peremptorily to the boy, "You can go now!" Then he turned again to Theron.

"Well, Mr. Ware, I'm glad to see you," he repeated, and drew up a chair by the window. "Things are going all right with you, I hope?"

Theron noted again the waving black hair, the dark skin, and the carefully trimmed moustache and chin-tuft, which gave the lawyer's face a combined effect of romance and smartness. No, it was the eyes—cool, shrewd, dark-grey eyes—which suggested this latter quality. The recollection of having seen one of them wink, in deliberate hostility of sarcasm, when those other trustees had their backs turned, came mercifully at the moment to recall the young minister to his errand.

"I thought I would drop in and have a chat with you," he said, getting better under way as he went on. "Quarterly Conference is only a fortnight off, and I am a good deal at sea about what is going to happen."

"I'm not a church member, you know," interposed Gorringer. "That shuts me out of the Quarterly Conference."

"Alas, yes!" said Theron; "I wish it didn't. I'm afraid I'm not going to have any friends to spare there."

"What are you afraid of?" asked the lawyer, seeming now to be wholly at his ease again. "They can't eat you."

"No; they keep me too lean for that," responded Theron, with a pensive smile. "I *was* going to ask, you know, for an increase of salary or an extra allowance. I don't see how I can go on as it is. The sum fixed by the last Quarterly Conference of the old year, and which I am getting now, is \$100 less than my predecessor had. That isn't fair, and it isn't right. But so far from its looking as if I could get an increase, the prospect seems rather that they will make me pay for the gas and that side-walk. I never recovered more than about half of my moving expenses, as you know, and—and, frankly, I don't know which way to turn. It keeps me miserable all the while."

"That's where you're wrong," said Mr. Gorringe. "If you let things like that worry you, you'll keep a sore skin all your life. You take my advice, and just go ahead your own gait, and let other folks do the worrying. They *are* pretty close-fisted here, for a fact, but you can manage to rub along somehow. If you should get into any real difficulties, why, I guess"—the lawyer paused to smile in a hesitating, significant way—"I guess some road out can be found all right. The main thing is, don't fret, and don't allow your wife to—to fret either."

He stopped abruptly. Theron nodded in recognition of his amiable tone, and then found the nod lengthening itself out into almost a bow, as the thought spread through his mind that this had been nothing more nor less than a promise to help him with money, if worst came to worst. He looked at Levi Gorringer, and said to himself that the intuition of women was wonderful. Alice had picked him out as a friend of theirs, merely by seeing him pass the house.

"Yes," he said, "I am specially anxious to keep my wife from worrying. She was surrounded in her girlhood by a good deal of what, relatively, we should call luxury, and that makes it all the harder for her to be a poor minister's wife. I had quite decided to get her a hired girl, come what might, but she thinks she'd rather get on without one. Her health is better, I must admit, than it was when we came here. She works out in her garden a great deal, and that seems to agree with her. She's making a most beautiful garden of it."

"Octavius is a healthy place—that's generally admitted," replied the lawyer, with indifference. He seemed no longer interested in Mrs. Ware's health, but looked intently out through the window at the buildings opposite and drummed with his fingers on the arms of his chair.

Theron made haste to revert to his errand. "Of course, your not being in the Quarterly Conference," he

said, "that renders certain things impossible. But I didn't know but you might have some knowledge of how matters are going, what plans the officials of the church had; they seem to have agreed to tell me nothing."

"Well, I *have* heard this much," responded Gorringe. "They're figuring on getting the Soulsbys here, to raise the debt and kind o' shake things up generally. I guess that's about as good as settled. Hadn't you heard of it?"

"Not a breath!" exclaimed Theron mournfully. "Well," he added upon reflection, "I'm sorry—down-right sorry. The debt-raiser seems to me about the lowest-down thing we produce. I've heard of those Soulsbys—I think I saw *him* once at Conference—but I believe *she* is the head of the firm."

"Yes, she wears the breeches, I understand," said Gorringe sententially.

"I *had* hoped," the young minister began, with a rueful sigh, "in fact, I felt quite confident at the outset that I could pay off this debt, and put the church generally on a new footing, by giving extra attention to my pulpit work. It is hardly for me to say it, but in other places where I have been my preaching has been rather—rather a feature in the town itself. I have always been accustomed to attract to our services a good many non-members, and that, as you know, helps

tremendously from a money point of view. But, somehow, that has failed here. I doubt if the average congregations are a whit larger now than they were when I came, in April. I know the collections are not."

"No," commented the lawyer slowly, "you'll never do anything in that line in Octavius. You might, of course, if you were to stay here and work hard at it for five or six years."

"Heaven forbid!" groaned Mr. Ware.

"Quite so," put in the other. "The point is, that the Methodists here are a little set by themselves. I don't know that they like one another specially, but I do know that they are not what you might call popular with people outside. Now, a new preacher at the Presbyterian church, or even the Baptist—he might have a chance to create talk and make a stir. But Methodist—no! People who don't belong won't come near the Methodist church here, so long as there's any other place with a roof on it to go to. Give a dog a bad name, you know. Well, the Methodists here have got a bad name, and if you could preach like Henry Ward Beecher himself you wouldn't change it, or get folks to come and hear you."

"I see what you mean," Theron responded. "I'm not particularly surprised myself that Octavius doesn't love us, or look to us for intellectual stimulation. I myself leave that pulpit more often than otherwise feeling

like a wet rag, utterly limp and discouraged. But—if you don't mind my speaking of it—*you* don't belong, and yet *you* come."

It was evident that the lawyer did not mind. He spoke freely in reply. "Oh yes, I've got into the habit of it. I began going when I first came here, and—and so it grew to be natural for me to go. Then, of course, being the only lawyer you have, a considerable amount of my business is mixed up in one way or another with your membership; you see, those are really the things which settle a man in a rut, and keep him there."

"I suppose your people were Methodists," said Theron, to fill in the pause, "and that is how you originally started with us."

Levi Gorringe shook his head. He leaned back, half closed his eyes, put his finger-tips together, and almost smiled, as if something in retrospect pleased and moved him.

"No," he said; "I went to the church first to see a girl who used to go there. It was long before your time. All her family moved away years ago. You wouldn't know any of them. I was younger then, and I didn't know as much as I do now. I worshipped the very ground that girl walked on, and, like a fool, I never gave her so much as a hint of it. Looking back now, I can see that I might have had her if I'd asked her. But I went instead and sat around and looked at her

—at church and Sunday-school and prayer-meetings Thursday nights, and class-meetings after the sermon. She was devoted to religion and church work, and thinking it would please her, I joined the church on probation. Men can fool themselves much easier than they can other people. I actually believed at the time that I had experienced religion. I felt myself full of all sorts of awakenings of the soul and so forth. But it was really that girl. You see, I'm telling you the thing just as it was. I was very happy. I think it was the happiest time of my life. I remember there was a love-feast while I was on probation, and I sat down in front right beside her, and we ate the little square chunks of bread and drank the water together, and I held one corner of her hymn-book when we stood up and sang. That was the nearest I ever got to her, or to full membership in the church. That very next week, I think it was, we learnt that she had got engaged to the minister's son, a young man who had just become a minister himself. They got married, and went away—and I—somehow I never took up my membership when the six months' probation was over. That's how it was."

"It is very interesting," remarked Theron softly, after a little silence, "and very full of human nature."

"Well, now you see," said the lawyer, "what I mean when I say that there hasn't been another minister here since that I should have felt like telling this story to.

They wouldn't have understood it at all. They would have thought it was blasphemy for me to say straight out that what I took for experiencing religion was really a girl. But you are different. I felt that at once, the first time I saw you. In a pulpit or out of it, what I like in a human being is that he *should* be human."

"It pleases me beyond measure that you should like me, then," returned the young minister, with frank gratification shining on his face. "The world is made all the sweeter and more lovable by these—these elements of romance. I am not one of those who would wish to see them banished or frowned upon. I don't mind admitting to you that there is a good deal in Methodism—I mean the strict practice of its letter which you find here in Octavius—that is personally distasteful to me. I read the other day of an English bishop who said boldly, publicly, that no modern nation could practise the principles laid down in the Sermon on the Mount and survive for twenty-four hours."

"Ha ha! That's good!" laughed the lawyer.

"I felt that it was good, too," pursued Theron. "I am getting to see a great many things differently, here in Octavius. Our Methodist Discipline is like the Beatitudes—very helpful and beautiful if treated as spiritual suggestion, but more or less of a stumbling-block if insisted upon literally. I declare!" he added, sitting up in his chair, "I never talked like this to a

living soul before in all my life. Your confidences were contagious."

The Rev. Mr. Ware rose as he spoke, and took up his hat.

"Must you be going?" asked the lawyer, also rising. "Well, I'm glad I haven't shocked you. Come in oftener, when you are passing. And if you see anything I can help you in, always tell me."

The two men shook hands, with an emphatic and lingering clasp.

"I am glad," said Theron, "that you didn't stop coming to church—just because you lost the girl."

Levi Gorringe answered the minister's pleasantry with a smile which curled his moustache upward and expanded in little wrinkles at the ends of his eyes. "No," he said jestingly. "I'm death on collecting debts, and I reckon that the church still owes me a girl. I'll have one yet."

So, with merriment, the echoes of which pleasantly accompanied Theron down the stairway, the two men parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

THOUGH time lagged in passing with a slowness which seemed born of studied insolence, there did arrive at last a day which had something definitive about it to Theron's disturbed and restless mind. It was a Thursday, and the prayer-meeting to be held that evening would be the last before the Quarterly Conference, now only four days off.

For some reason the young minister found himself dwelling upon this fact, and investing it with importance. But yesterday the Quarterly Conference had seemed a long way ahead. To-day brought it alarmingly close to hand. He had not heretofore regarded the weekly assemblage for prayer and song as a thing calling for preparation or for any preliminary thought. Now on this Thursday morning he went to his desk after breakfast, which was a sign that he wanted the room to himself, quite as if he had the task of a weighty sermon before him. He sat at the desk all the forenoon, doing no writing, it is true, but remembering every once in a while, when his mind turned aside from the book in his hands, that there was that prayer-meeting in the even-

ing. Sometimes he reached the point of vaguely wondering why this strictly commonplace affair should be forcing itself thus upon his attention. Then, with a kind of mental shiver at the recollection that this was Thursday, and that the great struggle came on Monday, he would go back to his book.

There were a half-dozen volumes on the open desk before him. He had taken them out from beneath a pile of old *Sunday-School Advocates* and church magazines, where they had lain hidden from Alice's view most of the week. If there had been a locked drawer in the house he would have used it instead to hold these books, which had come to him in a neat parcel, which also contained an amiable note from Dr. Ledsmar, recalling a pleasant evening in May, and expressing the hope that the accompanying works would be of some service. Theron had glanced at the backs of the uppermost two, and discovered that their author was Renan. Then he had hastily put the lot in the best place he could think of to escape his wife's observation.

He realised now that there had been no need for this secrecy. Of the other four books, by Sayce, Budge, Smith, and Lenormant, three indeed revealed themselves to be published under religious auspices. As for Renan, he might have known that the name would be meaningless to Alice. The feeling that he himself was not much wiser in this matter than his wife may have led him to

pass over the learned text-books on Chaldean antiquity, and even the volume of Renan which appeared to be devoted to Oriental inscriptions, and take up his other book, entitled in the translation "Recollections of my Youth." This he rather glanced through at the outset, following with a certain inattention the introductory sketches and essays which dealt with an unfamiliar and, to his notion, somewhat preposterous Breton racial type. Then, little by little, it dawned upon him that there was a connected story in all this; and suddenly he came upon it, out in the open, as it were. It was the story of how a deeply devout young man, trained from his earliest boyhood for the sacred office, and desiring passionately nothing but to be worthy of it, came to a point where, at infinite cost of pain to himself and of anguish to those dearest to him, he had to declare that he could no longer believe at all in revealed religion.

Theron Ware read all this with an excited interest which no book had ever stirred in him before. Much of it he read over and over again, to make sure that he penetrated everywhere the husk of French habits of thought and Catholic methods in which the kernel was wrapped. He broke off midway in this part of the book to go out to the kitchen to dinner, and began the meal in silence. To Alice's questions he replied briefly that he was preparing himself for the evening's prayer-meeting. She lifted her brows in such blank surprise

at this that he made a further and somewhat rambling explanation about having again taken up the work on his book, the book about Abraham.

"I thought you said you'd given that up altogether," she remarked.

"Well," he said, "I *was* discouraged about it for a while. But a man never does anything big without getting discouraged over and over again while he's doing it. I don't say now that I shall write precisely *that* book—I'm merely reading scientific works about the period just now—but if not that, I shall write some other book. Else how will you get that piano?" he added, with an attempt at a smile.

"I thought you had given that up too," she replied ruefully. Then, before he could speak, she went on: "Never mind the piano; that can wait. What I've got on my mind just now isn't piano; it's potatoes. Do you know, I saw some the other day at Rasbach's, splendid potatoes—these are some of them—and fifteen cents a bushel cheaper than those dried-up old things Brother Barnum keeps, and so I bought two bushels. And Sister Barnum met me on the street this morning, and threw it in my face that the Discipline commands us to trade with each other. Is there any such command?"

"Yes," said the husband. "It's Section 33. Don't you remember?—I looked it up at Tyre. We are to 'evidence our desire of salvation by doing good, espe-

cially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; by employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business,' and so on. Oh yes, it's all there."

"Well, I told her I didn't believe it was," put in Alice; "and I said that, even if it was, there ought to be another section about selling potatoes to their minister for more than they're worth—potatoes that turn all green when you boil them, too. I believe I'll read up that old Discipline myself, and see if it hasn't got some things that I can talk back with."

"The very section before that, Number 32, enjoins members against 'uncharitable or unprofitable conversation—particularly speaking evil of magistrates or ministers.' You'd have 'em there, I think." Theron had begun cheerfully enough, but the careworn, pre-occupied look returned now to his face. "I'm sorry if we've fallen out with the Barnums," he said. "His brother-in-law, Davis, the Sunday-school superintendent, is a member of the Quarterly Conference, you know, and I've been hoping that he was on my side. I've been taking a good deal of pains to make up to him."

He ended with a sigh, the pathos of which impressed Alice. "If you think it will do any good," she volunteered, "I'll go and call on the Davises this very afternoon. I'm sure to find her at home; she's tied hand

and foot with that brood of hers, and you'd better give me some of that candy for them."

Theron nodded his approval and thanks, and relapsed into silence. When the meal was over he brought out the confectionery to his wife, and without a word went back to that remarkable book.

When Alice returned toward the close of day to prepare the simple tea which was always laid a half-hour earlier on Thursdays and Sundays, she found her husband where she had left him, still busy with those new scientific works. She recounted to him some incidents of her call upon Mrs. Davis as she took off her hat and put on the big kitchen apron—how pleased Mrs. Davis seemed to be; how her affection for her sister-in-law, the grocer's wife, disclosed itself to be not even skin-deep; how the children leaped upon the candy as if they had never seen any before; and how, in her belief, Mr. Davis would be heart and soul on Theron's side at the Conference.

To her surprise, the young minister seemed not at all interested. He hardly looked at her during her narrative, but reclined in the easy-chair with his head thrown back, and an abstracted gaze wandering aimlessly about the ceiling. When she avowed her faith in the Sunday-school superintendent's loyal partisanship, which she did with a pardonable pride in having helped to make it secure, her husband even closed his eyes,

and moved his head with a gesture which plainly bespoke indifference.

"I expected you'd be tickled to death," she remarked, with evident disappointment.

"I've a bad headache," he explained, after a minute's pause.

"No wonder!" Alice rejoined, sympathetically enough, but with a note of reproof as well. "What can you expect, staying cooped up in here all day long, poring over those books? People are all the while remarking that you study too much. I tell them, of course, that you're a great hand for reading, and always were; but I think myself it would be better if you got out more, and took more exercise, and saw people. You know lots and slathers more than *they* do now, or ever will, if you never opened another book."

Theron regarded her with an expression which she had never seen on his face before. "You don't realise what you are saying," he replied slowly. He sighed as he added, with increased gravity, "I am the most ignorant man alive!"

Alice began a little laugh of wifely incredulity, and then let it die away as she recognised that he was really troubled and sad in his mind. She bent over to kiss him lightly on the brow, and tiptoed her way out into the kitchen.

"I believe I will let you make my excuses at the

prayer-meeting this evening," he said all at once, as the supper came to an end. He had eaten next to nothing during the meal, and had sat in a sort of brown study, from which Alice kindly forebore to arouse him. "I don't know—I hardly feel equal to it. They won't take it amiss—for the once—if you explain to them that I—I am not at all well."

"Oh, I do hope you're not coming down with anything!" Alice had risen too, and was gazing at him with a solicitude the tenderness of which at once comforted and in some obscure way jarred on his nerves. "Is there anything I can do, or shall I go for a doctor? We've got mustard in the house, and senna—I think there's some senna left—and Jamaica ginger."

Theron shook his head wearily at her. "Oh, no—no!" he expostulated. "It isn't anything that needs drugs, or doctors either. It's just mental worry and fatigue, that's all. An evening's quiet rest in the big chair and early to bed—that will fix me up all right."

"But you'll read, and that will make your head worse," said Alice.

"No, I won't read any more," he promised her, walking slowly into the sitting-room, and settling himself in the big chair, the while she brought out a pillow from the adjoining best bedroom and adjusted it behind his head. "That's nice! I'll just lie quiet here, and perhaps doze a little till you come back. I feel

in the mood for the rest; it will do me all sorts of good."

He closed his eyes, and Alice, regarding his upturned face anxiously, decided that already it looked more at peace than a while ago.

"Well, I hope you'll be better when I get back," she said, as she began preparations for the evening service. These consisted in combing stiffly back the strands of light-brown hair which, during the day, had exuberantly loosened themselves over her temples into something almost like curls; in fastening down upon this rebellious hair a plain brown-straw bonnet, guiltless of all ornament save a binding ribbon of dull umber hue; and in putting on a thin dark-grey shawl, and a pair of equally subdued lisle-thread gloves. Thus attired, she made a mischievous little grimace of dislike at her puritanical image in the looking-glass over the mantel, and then turned to announce her departure.

"Well, I'm off," she said. Theron opened his eyes to take in this figure of his wife dressed for prayer-meeting, and then closed them again abruptly. "All right," he murmured, and then he heard the door shut behind her.

Although he had been alone all day, there seemed to be quite a unique value and quality in this present solitude. He stretched out his legs on the opposite

chair and looked lazily about him, with the feeling that at last he had secured some leisure, and could think undisturbed to his heart's content. There were nearly two hours of unbroken quiet before him, and the mere fact of his having stepped aside from the routine of his duty to procure it marked it in his thoughts as a special occasion, which ought in the nature of things to yield more than the ordinary harvest of mental profit.

Theron's musings were broken in upon from time to time by rumbling outbursts of hymn-singing from the church next door. Surely, he said to himself, there could be no other congregation in the Conference, or in all Methodism, which sang so badly as these Octavians did. The noise, as it came to him now and again, divided itself familiarly into a main strain of hard, high, sharp, and tinny female voices, with three or four concurrent and clashing branch strains of part-singing by men who did not know how. How well he already knew these voices! Through two wooden walls he could detect the conceited and pushing note of Brother Lovejoy, who tried always to drown the rest out, and the lifeless, unmeasured weight of shrill clamour which Sister Barnum hurled into every chorus, half closing her eyes and sticking out her chin as she did so. They drawled their hymns too, these people, till Theron thought he understood that injunction in the Discipline against singing too slowly. It had puzzled him hereto-

fore; now he felt that it must have been meant in prophecy for Octavius.

It was impossible not to recall in contrast that other church music he had heard a month before, and the whole atmosphere of that other pastoral sitting-room, from which he had listened to it. The startled and crowded impressions of that strange evening had been lying hidden in his mind all this while, driven into a corner by the pressure of more ordinary, everyday matters. They came forth now, and passed across his brain, no longer confusing and distorted, but in orderly and intelligible sequence. Their earlier effect had been one of frightened fascination. Now he looked them over calmly as they lifted themselves, one by one, and found himself not shrinking at all, or evading anything, but dwelling upon each in turn as a natural and welcome part of the most important experience of his life.

The young minister had arrived all at once at this conclusion. He did not question at all the means by which he had reached it. Nothing was clearer to his mind than the conclusion itself—that his meeting with the priest and the Doctor was the turning-point in his career. They had lifted him bodily out of the slough of ignorance, of contact with low minds and sordid, narrow things, and put him on solid ground. This book he had been reading—this gentle, tender, lovable book,

which had as much true piety in it as any devotional book he had ever read, and yet, unlike all devotional books, put its foot firmly upon everything which could not be proved in human reason to be true—must be merely one of a thousand which men like Father Forbes and Dr. Ledsmar knew by heart. The very thought that he was on the way now to know them too made Theron tremble. The prospect wooed him, and he thrilled in response, with the wistful and delicate eagerness of a young lover.

Somehow the fact that the priest and the Doctor were not religious men, and that this book which had so impressed and stirred him was nothing more than Renan's recital of how he, too, ceased to be a religious man, did not take a form which Theron could look square in the face. It wore the shape, instead, of a vague premise that there were a great many different kinds of religions—the past and dead races had multiplied these in their time literally into thousands—and that each, no doubt, had its central support of truth somewhere for the good men who were in it, and that to call one of these divine and condemn all the others was a part fit only for untutored bigots. Renan had formally repudiated Catholicism, yet could write in his old age with the deepest filial affection of the mother Church he had quitted. Father Forbes could talk coolly about the "Christ-myth" without even ceasing to

be a priest, and apparently a very active and effective priest. Evidently there was an intellectual world, a world of culture and grace, of lofty thoughts and the inspiring communion of real knowledge, where creeds were not of importance, and where men asked one another, not "Is your soul saved?" but "Is your mind well furnished?" Theron had the sensation of having been invited to become a citizen of this world. The thought so dazzled him that his impulses were dragging him forward to take the new oath of allegiance before he had had time to reflect upon what it was he was abandoning.

The droning of the Doxology from the church outside stirred Theron suddenly out of his reverie. It had grown quite dark, and he rose and lit the gas. "Blest be the Tie that Binds" they were singing. He paused, with hand still in air, to listen. That well-worn phrase arrested his attention and gave itself a new meaning. He was bound to those people, it was true, but he could never again harbour the delusion that the tie between them was blessed. There was vaguely present in his mind the consciousness that other ties were loosening as well. Be that as it might, one thing was certain: he had passed definitely beyond pretending to himself that there was anything spiritually in common between him and the Methodist church of Octavius. The necessity of his keeping up the pretence with others rose on

the instant like a looming shadow before his mental vision. He turned away from it, and bent his brain to think of something else.

The noise of Alice opening the front-door came as a pleasant digression. A second later it became clear from the sound of voices that she had brought someone back with her, and Theron hastily stretched himself out again in the arm-chair, with his head back on the pillow and his feet on the other chair. He had come awkwardly near forgetting that he was an invalid, and he protected himself the further now by assuming an air of lassitude verging upon prostration.

"Yes; there's a light burning. It's all right," he heard Alice say. She entered the room, and Theron's head was too bad to permit him to turn it and see who her companion was.

"Theron dear," Alice began, "I knew you'd be glad to see *her*, even if you were out of sorts; and I persuaded her just to run in for a minute. Let me introduce you to Sister Soulsby. Sister Soulsby—my husband."

The Rev. Mr. Ware sat upright with an energetic start, and fastened upon the stranger a look which conveyed anything but the satisfaction his wife had been so sure about. It was at the first blush an undisguised scowl, and only some fleeting memory of that reflection about needing now to dissemble prevented him from

still frowning as he rose to his feet and perfunctorily held out his hand.

"Delighted, I'm sure," he mumbled. Then, looking up, he discovered that Sister Soulsby knew he was not delighted, and that she seemed not to mind in the least.

"As your good lady said, I just ran in for a moment," she remarked, shaking his limp hand with a brisk, business-like grasp and dropping it. "I hate bothering sick people, but as we're to be thrown together a good deal this next week or so, I thought I'd like to lose no time in saying 'Howdy?' I won't keep you up now. Your wife has been sweet enough to ask me to move my trunk over here in the morning, so that you'll see enough of me, and to spare."

Theron looked falteringly into her face, as he strove for words which should sufficiently mask the disgust this intelligence stirred within him. A debt-raiser in the town was bad enough. A debt-raiser quartered in the very parsonage!—he ground his teeth to think of it.

Alice read his hesitation aright. "Sister Soulsby went to the hotel," she hastily put in, "and Loren Pierce was after her to come and stay at his house, and I ventured to tell her that I thought we could make her more comfortable here." She accompanied this by so daring a grimace and nod, that her husband

woke up to the fact that a point in Conference politics was involved.

He squeezed a doubtful smile upon his features. "We shall both do our best," he said. It was not easy, but he forced increasing amiability into his glance and tone. "Is Brother Soulsby here too?" he asked.

The debt-raiser shook her head—again the prompt, decisive movement, so like a busy man of affairs. "No," she answered. "He's doing supply down on the Hudson this week, but he'll be here in time for the Sunday morning Love Feast. I always like to come on ahead and see how the land lies. Well, good-night! Your head will be all right in the morning."

Precisely what she meant by this assurance Theron did not attempt to guess. He received her adieu, noted the masterful manner in which she kissed his wife, and watched her pass out into the hall, with the feeling uppermost that this was a person who decidedly knew her way about. Much as he was prepared to dislike her, and much as he detested the vulgar methods her profession typified, he could not deny that she seemed a very capable sort of woman.

This mental concession did not prevent his fixing upon Alice, when she returned to the room, a glance of obvious disapproval.

"Theron," she broke forth, to anticipate his re-

proach, "I did it for the best. The Pierces would have got her if I hadn't cut in. I thought it would help to have her on our side. And, besides, I like her. She's the first sister I've seen since we've been in this hole that's had a kind word for me—or—or sympathised with me! And—and—if you're going to be offended—I shall cry!"

There were real tears on her lashes, ready to make good the threat. "Oh, I guess I wouldn't," said Theron, with an approach to his old half-playful manner. "If you like her, that's the chief thing."

Alice shook her tear-drops away. "No," she replied, with a wistful smile; "the chief thing is to have her like you. She's as smart as a steel trap, that woman is, and, if she took the notion, I believe she could help get us a better place."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ensuing week went by with a buzz and a whirl, circling about Theron Ware's dizzy consciousness like some huge impalpable teetotum, sent spinning under Sister Soulsby's resolute hands. Whenever his vagrant memory recurred to it, in after months, he began by marvelling, and ended with a shudder of repulsion.

It was a week crowded with events, which seemed to him to shoot past so swiftly that in effect they came all of a heap. He never essayed the task, in retrospect, of arranging them in their order of sequence. They had, however, a definite and interdependent chronology which it is worth the while to trace.

Mrs. Soulsby brought her trunk round to the parsonage bright and early on Friday morning, and took up her lodgment in the best bedroom, and her headquarters in the house at large, with a cheerful and business-like manner. She desired nothing so much, she said, as that people should not put themselves out on her account, or allow her to get in their way. She appeared to mean this, too, and to have very good ideas about securing its realisation.

During both Friday and the following day, indeed, Theron saw her only at the family meals. There she displayed a hearty relish for all that was set before her which quite won Mrs. Ware's heart, and though she talked rather more than Theron found himself expecting from a woman, he could not deny that her conversation was both seemly and entertaining. She had evidently been a great traveller, and referred to things she had seen in Savannah, or Montreal, or Los Angeles in as matter-of-fact fashion as he could have spoken of a visit to Tecumseh. Theron asked her many questions about these and other far-off cities, and her answers were all so pat, and showed so keen and clear an eye, that he began in spite of himself to think of her with a certain admiration.

She in turn plied him with inquiries about the principal pew-holders and members of his congregation—their means, their disposition, and the measure of their devotion. She put these queries with such intelligence, and seemed to assimilate his replies with such an alert understanding, that the young minister was spurred to put dashes of character in his descriptions, and set forth the idiosyncrasies and distinguishing earmarks of his flock with what he felt afterward might have been too free a tongue. But at the time her fine air of appreciation led him captive. He gossiped about his parishioners as if he enjoyed it. He made a specially happy thumb-

nail sketch for her of one of his trustees—Erastus Winch, the loud-mouthed, ostentatiously jovial, and really cold-hearted cheese-buyer. She was particularly interested in hearing about this man. The personality of Winch seemed to have impressed her, and she brought the talk back to him more than once, and prompted Theron to the very threshold of indiscretion in his confidences on the subject.

Save at meal-times, Sister Soulsby spent the two days out around among the Methodists of Octavius. She had little or nothing to say about what she thus saw and heard, but used it as the basis for still further inquiries. She told more than once, however, of how she had been pressed here or there to stay to dinner or supper, and how she had excused herself. "I've knocked about too much," she would explain to the Wares, "not to fight shy of random country cooking. When I find such a born cook as you are—well, I know when I'm well off." Alice flushed with pleased pride at this, and Theron himself felt that their visitor showed great good sense. By Saturday noon the two women were calling each other by their first names. Theron learned with a certain interest that Sister Soulsby's Christian name was Candace.

It was only natural that he should give even more thought to her than to her quaint and unfamiliar old Ethiopian name. She was undoubtedly a very smart

woman. To his surprise, she had never introduced in her talk any of the stock religious and devotional phrases which official Methodists so universally employed in mutual converse. She might have been an insurance agent, or a school teacher, visiting in a purely secular household, so little parade of cant was there about her.

He caught himself wondering how old she was. She seemed to have been pretty well over the whole American continent, and that must take years of time. Perhaps, however, the exertion of so much travel would tend to age one in appearance. Her eyes were still youthful—decidedly wise eyes, but yet juvenile. They had sparkled with almost girlish merriment at some of his jokes. She turned them about a good deal when she spoke, making their glances fit and illustrate the things she said. He had never met anyone whose eyes played so constant and prominent a part in their owner's conversation. Theron had never seen a play, but he had encountered the portraits of famous queens of the drama several times in illustrated papers or shop windows, and it occurred to him that some of the more marked contortions of Sister Soulsby's eyes—notably a trick she had of rolling them swiftly round and plunging them, so to speak, into an intent, yearning, one might almost say devouring gaze at the speaker—were probably employed by eminent actresses like Ristori and Fanny Davenport.

The rest of Sister Soulsby was undoubtedly subordinated in interest to those eyes of hers. Sometimes her face seemed to be reviving temporarily a comeliness which had been constant in former days; then again it would look decidedly, organically plain. It was the worn and loose-skinned face of a nervous, middle-aged woman, who had had more than her share of trouble and drank too much tea. She wore the collar of her dress rather low, and Theron found himself wondering at this, because, though long and expansive, her neck certainly showed more cords and cavities than consorted with his vague ideal of statuesque beauty. Then he wondered at himself for thinking about it, and abruptly reined up his fancy, only to find that it was playing with speculations as to whether her yellowish complexion was due to that tea-drinking, or came to her as a legacy of Southern blood.

He knew that she was born in the South, because she said so. From the same source he learned that her father had been a wealthy planter, who was ruined by the war, and sank into a premature grave under the weight of his accumulated losses. The large dark rings around her eyes grew deeper still in their shadows when she told about this, and her ordinarily sharp voice took on a mellow cadence, with a soft drawling accent, turning u's into o's, and having no r's to speak of. Theron had imbibed somewhere in early days the conviction

that the South was the land of romance, of cavaliers and gallants and black eyes flashing behind mantillas and outspread fans, and somehow when Sister Soulsby used this intonation she suggested all these things.

But almost all her talk was in another key—a brisk, direct, idiomatic manner of speech, with an intonation hinting at no section in particular. It was merely that of the city-dweller as distinguished from the rustic. She was of about Alice's height, perhaps a shade taller. It did not escape the attention of the Wares that she wore clothes of a more stylish cut and a livelier arrangement of hues than any Alice had ever dared own, even in lax-minded Tyre. The two talked of this in their room on Friday night, and Theron explained that congregations would tolerate things of this sort with a stranger which would be sharply resented in the case of local folk whom they controlled. It was on this occasion that Alice in turn told Theron she was sure Mrs. Soulsby had false teeth, a confidence which she immediately regretted as an act of treachery to her sex.

On Saturday afternoon, toward evening, Brother Soulsby arrived, and was guided to the parsonage by his wife, who had gone to the dépôt to meet him. They must have talked over the situation pretty thoroughly on the way, for by the time the new-comer had washed his face and hands, and put on a clean

collar, Sister Soulsby was ready to announce her plan of campaign in detail.

Her husband was a man of small stature, and, like herself, of uncertain age. He had a gentle if rather dry, clean-shaven face, and wore his dust-coloured hair long behind. His little figure was clad in black clothes of a distinctively clerical fashion, and he had a white neckcloth neatly tied under his collar. The Wares noted that he looked clean and amiable rather than intellectually or spiritually powerful, as he took the vacant seat between theirs, and joined them in concentrating attention upon Mrs. Soulsby.

This lady, holding herself erect and alert on the edge of the low, big easy-chair, had the air of presiding over a meeting.

"My idea is," she began, with an easy implication that no one else's idea was needed, "that your Quarterly Conference, when it meets on Monday, must be adjourned to Tuesday. We will have the people all out to-morrow morning to Love Feast, and announcement can be made there, and at the morning service afterward, that a series of revival meetings are to be begun that same evening. Mr. Soulsby and I can take charge in the evening, and we'll see to it that *that* packs the house—fills the church to overflowing Monday evening. Then we'll quietly turn the meeting into a debt-raising

convention before they know where they are, and we'll wipe off the best part of the load. Now don't you see"—she turned her eyes full upon Theron as she spoke—"you want to hold your Quarterly Conference *after* this money's been raised, not before."

"I see what you mean," Mr. Ware responded gravely. "But——"

"But what?" Sister Soulsby interjected, with vivacity.

"Well," said Theron, picking his words, "in the first place, it rests with the Presiding Elder to say whether an adjournment can be made until Tuesday, not with me."

"That's all right. Leave that to me," said the lady.

"In the second place," Theron went on, still more hesitatingly, "there seems a certain—what shall I say?—indirection in—in——"

"In getting them together for a revival, and springing a debt-raising on them?" Sister Soulsby put in. "Why, man alive, that's the best part of it. You ought to be getting some notion by this time what these Octavius folks of yours are like. I've only been here two days, but I've got their measure down to an allspice. Supposing you were to announce to-morrow that the debt was to be raised Monday. How many men with bank accounts would turn up, do you think? You could put them all in your eye, sir—all in your eye!"

"Very possibly you're right," faltered the young minister.

"Right? Why, of course I'm right," she said, with placid confidence. "You've got to take folks as you find them, and you've got to find them the best way you can. One place can be worked—managed in one way, and another needs quite a different way, and both ways would be dead frosts—complete failures in a third."

Brother Soulsby coughed softly here, and shuffled his feet for an instant on the carpet. His wife resumed her remarks with slightly abated animation and at a slower pace.

"My experience," she said, "has shown me that the Apostle was right. To properly serve the cause one must be all things to all men. I have known very queer things indeed turn out to be means of grace. You simply *can't* get along without some of the wisdom of the serpent. We are commanded to have it, for that matter. And now, speaking of that, do you know when the Presiding Elder arrives in town to-day, and where he is going to eat supper and sleep?"

Theron shook his head. "All I know is, he isn't likely to come here," he said; and added sadly, "I'm afraid he's not an admirer of mine."

"Perhaps that's not all his fault," commented Sister

Soulsby. "I'll tell you something. He came in on the same train as my husband, and that old trustee Pierce of yours was waiting for him with his buggy, and I saw like a flash what was in the wind, and the minute the train stopped I caught the Presiding Elder, and invited him in your name to come right here and stay; told him you and Alice were just set on his coming; wouldn't take no for an answer. Of course he couldn't come; I knew well enough he had promised old Pierce; but we got in our invitation anyway, and it won't do you any harm. Now; that's what I call having some gumption, wisdom of the serpent, and so on."

"I'm sure," remarked Alice, "I should have been mortified to death if he *had* come. We lost the extension-leaf to our table in moving, and four is all it'll seat decently."

Sister Soulsby smiled winningly into the wife's honest face. "Don't you see, dear," she explained patiently, "I only asked him because I knew he couldn't come. A little butter goes a long way, if it's only intelligently warmed."

"It was certainly very ingenious of you," Theron began, almost stiffly. Then he yielded to the humanities, and with a kindling smile added, "And it was as kind as kind could be. I'm afraid you're wrong about its doing me any good, but I can see how well you meant it, and I'm grateful."

"We *could* have sneaked in the kitchen table, perhaps, while he was out in the garden, and put on the extra long table-cloth," interjected Alice musingly.

Sister Soulsby smiled again at Sister Ware, but without any words this time, and Alice on the instant rose, with the remark that she must be going out to see about supper.

"I'm going to insist on coming out to help you," Mrs. Soulsby declared, "as soon as I've talked over one little matter with your husband. Oh yes, you must let me this time. I insist!"

As the kitchen door closed behind Mrs. Ware, a swift and apparently significant glance shot its way across from Sister Soulsby's roving, eloquent eyes to the calmer and smaller grey orbs of her husband. He rose to his feet, made some little explanation about being a gardener himself and desiring to inspect more closely some rhododendrons he had noticed in the garden, and forthwith moved decorously out by the other door into the front hall. They heard his footsteps on the gravel beneath the window before Mrs. Soulsby spoke again.

"You're right about the Presiding Elder, and you're wrong," she said. "He isn't what one might call precisely in love with you. Oh, I know the story—how you got into debt at Tyre, and he stepped in and insisted on your being denied Tecumseh and sent here instead."

"*He* was responsible for that, then, was he?" broke in Theron, with contracted brows.

"Why, don't you make any effort to find out anything at *all*?" she asked, pertly enough, but with such obvious good nature that he could not but have pleasure in her speech. "Why, of course he did it! Who else did you suppose?"

"Well," said the young minister despondently, "if he's as much against me as all that, I might as well hang up my fiddle and go home."

Sister Soulsby gave a little involuntary groan of impatience. She bent forward, and lifting her eyes, rolled them at him in a curve of downward motion which suggested to his fancy the image of two eagles in a concerted pounce upon a lamb.

"My friend," she began, with a new note of impressiveness in her voice, "if you'll pardon my saying it, you haven't got the spunk of a mouse. If you're going to lie down and let everybody trample over you just as they please, you're right! You *might* as well go home. But now here, this is what I wanted to say to you: Do you just keep your hands off, these next few days, and leave this whole thing to me. I'll pull it into ship-shape for you. No—wait a minute—don't interrupt now. I have taken a liking to you. You've got brains and you've got human nature in you, and heart. What you lack is

sabe—common-sense. You'll get that too in time, and meanwhile I'm not going to stand by and see you cut up and fed to the dogs for want of it. I'll get you through this scrape and put you on your feet again, right-side-up-with-care, because, as I said, I like you. I like your wife too, mind. She's a good, honest little soul, and she worships the very ground you tread on. Of course, as long as people *will* marry in their teens, the wrong people will get yoked up together. But that's neither here nor there. She's a kind, sweet little body, and she's devoted to you, and it isn't every intellectual man that gets even that much. But now it's a go, is it? You promise to keep quiet, do you, and leave the whole show absolutely to me? Shake hands on it."

Sister Soulsby had risen, and stood now holding out her hand in a frank, manly fashion. Theron looked at the hand, and made mental notes that there were a good many veins discernible on the small wrist, and that the forearm seemed to swell out more than would have been expected in a woman producing such a general effect of leanness. He caught the shine of a thin bracelet-band of gold under the sleeve. A delicate, significant odour just hinted its presence in the air about this outstretched arm—something which was not a perfume, yet deserved as gracious a name.

He rose to his feet and took the proffered hand with a deliberate gesture, as if he had been cautiously

weighing all the possible arguments for and against this momentous compact.

"I promise," he said gravely, and the two palms squeezed themselves together in an earnest clasp.

"Right you are!" exclaimed the lady, once more with cheery vivacity. "Mind, when it's all over, I'm going to give you a good, serious, downright talking-to—a regular hoeing-over. I'm not sure I shan't give you a sound shaking into the bargain. You need it. And now I'm going out to help Alice."

The Rev. Mr. Ware remained standing after his new friend had left the room, and his meditative face wore an even unusual air of abstraction. He strolled aimlessly over, after a time, to the desk by the window, and stood there looking out at the slight figure of Brother Soulsby, who was bending over and attentively regarding some pink blossoms on a shrub through what seemed to be a pocket magnifying-glass.

What remained uppermost in his mind was not this interesting woman's confident pledge of championship in his material difficulties. He found himself dwelling instead upon her remark about the incongruous results of early marriages. He wondered idly if the little man in the white tie, fussing out there over that rhododendron-bush, had figured in her thoughts as an example of these evils. Then he reflected that they had been mentioned in clear relation to talk about Alice.

Now that he faced this question, it was as if he had been consciously ignoring and putting it aside for a long time. How was it, he asked himself now, that Alice, who had once seemed so bright and keen-witted, who had in truth started out immeasurably his superior in swiftness of apprehension and readiness in humorous quips and conceits, should have grown so dull? For she was undoubtedly slow to understand things nowadays. Her absurd lugging in of the extension-table problem, when the great strategic point of that invitation foisted upon the Presiding Elder came up, was only the latest sample of a score of these heavy-minded exhibitions that recalled themselves to him. And outsiders were apparently beginning to notice it. He knew by intuition what those phrases, "good, honest little soul" and "kind, sweet little body" signified, when another woman used them to a husband about his wife. The very employment of that word "little" was enough, considering that there was scarcely more than a hair's difference between Mrs. Soulsby and Alice, and that they were both rather tall than otherwise, as the stature of women went.

What she had said about the chronic misfortunes of intellectual men in such matters gave added point to those meaning phrases. Nobody could deny that geniuses and men of conspicuous talent had as a rule, all through history, contracted unfortunate marriages. In almost

every case where their wives were remembered at all, it was on account of their abnormal stupidity or bad temper, or something of that sort. Take Xantippe, for example, and Shakespeare's wife, and—and—well, there was Byron, and Bulwer-Lytton, and ever so many others.

Of course there was nothing to be done about it. These things happened, and one could only put the best possible face on them, and live one's appointed life as patiently and contentedly as might be. And Alice undoubtedly merited all the praise which had been so generously bestowed upon her. She *was* good and honest and kindly, and there could be no doubt whatever as to her utter devotion to him. These were tangible, solid qualities, which must always secure respect for her. It was true that she no longer seemed to be very popular among people. He questioned whether men, for instance, like Father Forbes and Dr. Ledsmar would care much about her. Visions of the wifeless and academic calm in which these men spent their lives—an existence consecrated to literature and knowledge and familiarity with all the loftiest and noblest thoughts of the past—rose and enveloped him in a cloud of depression. No such lot would be his! He must labour along among ignorant and spiteful narrow-minded people to the end of his days, pocketing their insults and fawning upon the harsh hands of jealous nonentities who happened to be his official masters, just to keep a roof

over his head—or rather Alice's. He must sacrifice everything to this—his ambitions, his passionate desires to do real good in the world on a large scale, his mental freedom—yes, even his chance of having truly elevating intellectual friendships. For it was plain enough that the men whose friendship would be of genuine and stimulating profit to him would not like her. Now that he thought of it, she seemed latterly to make no friends at all.

Suddenly, as he watched in a blank sort of way Brother Soulsby take out a pen-knife and lop an offending twig from a rose-bush against the fence, something occurred to him. There was a curious exception to that rule of Alice's isolation. She had made at least one friend. Levi Gorringe seemed to like her extremely.

As if his mind had been a camera, Theron snapped a shutter down upon this odd, unbidden idea, and turned away from the window.

The sounds of an active, almost strenuous conversation in female voices came from the kitchen. Theron opened the door noiselessly and put in his head, conscious of something furtive in his intention.

"You must dreem every drop of water off the spinach, mind, before you put it over, or else——"

It was Sister Soulsby's sharp and penetrating tones which came to him. Theron closed the door again, and surrendered himself once more to the circling whirl of his thoughts.

CHAPTER XV.

A LOVE Feast at nine in the morning opened the public services of a Sunday still memorable in the annals of Octavius Methodism.

This ceremony, which four times a year preceded the sessions of the Quarterly Conference, was not necessarily an event of importance. It was an occasion upon which the brethren and sisters who clung to the old-fashioned, primitive ways of the itinerant circuit-riders let themselves go with emphasised independence, putting up more vehement prayers than usual, and adding a special fervour of noise to their "Amens" and other interjections—and that was all.

It was Theron's first Love Feast in Octavius, and as the big class-room in the church basement began to fill up, and he noted how the men with ultra-radical views and the women clad in the most ostentatious drabs and greys were crowding into the front seats, he felt his spirits sinking. He had literally to force himself from sentence to sentence, when the time came for him to rise and open the proceedings with an exhortation. He had eagerly offered this function to the Presiding Elder,

the Rev. Aziel P. Larrabee, who sat in severe silence on the little platform behind him, but had been informed that that dignitary would lead off in giving testimony later on. So Theron, feeling all the while the hostile eyes of the Elder burning holes in his back, dragged himself somehow through the task. He had never known any such difficulty of speech before. The relief was almost overwhelming when he came to the customary part, where all are adjured to be as brief as possible in witnessing for the Lord, because the time belongs to all the people, and the Discipline forbids the feast to last more than ninety minutes. He delivered this injunction to brevity with marked earnestness, and then sat down abruptly.

There was some rather boisterous singing, during which the stewards, beginning with the platform, passed plates of bread cut in small cubes, and water in big plated pitchers and tumblers, about among the congregation, threading their way between the long wooden benches ordinarily occupied at this hour by the children of the Sunday-school, and helping each brother and sister in turn. They held by the old custom, here in Octavius, and all along the seats the sexes alternated, as they do at a polite dinner-table.

Theron impassively watched the familiar scene. The early nervousness had passed away. He felt now that he was not in the least afraid of these people, even

with the Presiding Elder thrown in. Folks who sang with such unintelligence, and who threw themselves with such undignified fervour into this childish business of the bread and water, could not be formidable antagonists for a man of intellect. He had never realised before what a spectacle the Methodist Love Feast probably presented to outsiders. What must they think of it!

He had noticed that the Soulsbys sat together, in the centre and towards the front. Next to Brother Soulsby sat Alice. He thought she looked pale and preoccupied, and set it down in passing to her innate distaste for the sombre garments she was wearing, and for the company she perforce found herself in. Another head was in the way, and for a time Theron did not observe who sat beside Alice on the other side. When at last he saw that it was Levi Gorringer, his instinct was to wonder what the lawyer must be saying to himself about these noisy and shallow enthusiasts. A recurring emotion of loyalty to the simple people, among whom, after all, he had lived his whole life, prompted him to feel that it wasn't wholly nice of Gorringer to come and enjoy this revelation of their foolish side, as if it were a circus. There was some vague memory in his mind which associated Gorringer with other Love Feasts, and with a cynical attitude toward them. Oh yes! he had told how he went to one, just for the sake of sitting beside the girl he admired, and was pursuing.

The stewards had completed their round, and the loud, discordant singing came to an end. There ensued a little pause, during which Theron turned to the Presiding Elder with a gesture of invitation to take charge of the further proceedings. The Elder responded with another gesture, calling his attention to something going on in front.

Brother and Sister Soulsby, to the considerable surprise of everybody, had risen to their feet, and were standing in their place, quite motionless, and with an air of professional self-assurance dimly discernible under a large show of humility. They stood thus until complete silence had been secured. Then the woman, lifting her head, began to sing. The words were "Rock of Ages," but no one present had heard the tune to which she wedded them. Her voice was full and very sweet, and had in it tender cadences which all her hearers found touching. She knew how to sing, and she put forth the words so that each was distinctly intelligible. There came a part where Brother Soulsby, lifting his head in turn, took up a tuneful second to her air. Although the two did not, as one could hear by listening closely, sing the same words at the same time, they produced none the less the most moving and delightful harmonies of sound.

The experience was so novel and charming that listeners ran ahead in their minds to fix the number of

verses there were in the hymn, and to hope that none would be left out. Toward the end, when some of the intolerably self-conceited local singers, fancying they had caught the tune, started to join in, they were stopped by an indignant "Sh-h!" which rose from all parts of the class-room, and the Soulsbys, with a patient and pensive kindliness written on their uplifted faces, gave that verse over again.

What followed seemed obviously restrained and modified by the effect of this unlooked-for and tranquilising overture. The Presiding Elder was known to enjoy visits to old-fashioned congregations like that of Octavius, where he could indulge to the full his inner passion for high-pitched, passionate invocations and violent spiritual demeanour, but this time he spoke temperately, almost soothingly. The most tempestuous of the local witnesses for the Lord gave in their testimony in relatively pacific tones, under the influence of the spell which good music had laid upon the gathering. There was the deepest interest as to what the two visitors would do in this way. Brother Soulsby spoke first, very briefly and in well-rounded and well-chosen, if conventional, phrases. His wife, following him, delivered in a melodious monotone some equally hackneyed remarks. The assemblage, listening in rapt attention, felt the suggestion of reserved power in every sentence she uttered, and burst forth, as she dropped

into her seat, in a loud chorus of approving ejaculations. The Soulsbys had captured Octavius with their first outer skirmish line.

At the service upstairs everything moved with a new zest and spontaneity. Theron had picked out for the occasion the best of those sermons which he had prepared in Tyre, at the time when he was justifying his ambition to be accounted a pulpit orator. It was orthodox enough, but had been planned as the framework for picturesque and emotional rhetoric rather than doctrinal edification. He had never dreamed of trying it on Octavius before, and only on the yesterday had quavered at his own daring in choosing it now. Nothing but the desire to show Sister Soulsby what was in him had held him to the selection.

Something of this same desire no doubt swayed and steadied him now in the pulpit. The laboured slowness of his beginning seemed to him to be due to nervous timidity, until suddenly, looking down into those big eyes of Sister Soulsby's, which were fixed gravely upon him from where she sat beside Alice in the minister's pew, he remembered that it was instead the studied deliberation which art had taught him. He went on, feeling more and more that the skill and histrionic power of his best days were returning to him, were as marked as ever—nay, had never triumphed before as they were triumphing now. The congregation watched

and listened, with open, steadfast eyes and parted lips. For the first time in all that weary quarter their faces shone. The sustaining sparkle of their gaze lifted him to a peroration unrivalled in his own recollection of himself.

He sat down, and bent his head forward upon the open Bible, breathing hard, but suffused with a glow of satisfaction. His ears caught the music of that sighing rustle through the audience which bespeaks a profound impression. He could scarcely keep the fingers of his hands, covering his bowed face in a devotional posture as they were, from drumming a jubilant tattoo. His pulses did this in every vein, throbbing with excited exultation. The insistent whim seized him, as he still bent thus before his people, to whisper to his own heart, "At last!—The dogs!"

The announcement that in the evening a series of revival meetings was to be inaugurated had been made at the Love Feast, and it was repeated now from the pulpit, with the added statement that for the once the class-meetings usually following this morning service would be suspended. Then Theron came down the steps, conscious after a fashion that the Presiding Elder had laid a propitiatory hand on his shoulder and spoken amiably about his effort, and that several groups of more or less important parishioners were waiting in the aisle and the vestibule to shake hands and tell him how

much they had enjoyed the sermon. His mind perversely kept hold of the thought that all this came too late. He politely smiled his way along out, and overtaking the Soulsbys and his wife near the parsonage gate, went in with them.

At the cold, picked-up noonday meal which was the Sunday rule of the house, Theron rather expected that his guests would talk about the sermon, or at any rate about the events of the morning. A Sabbath chill seemed to have settled upon both their tongues. They ate almost in silence, and their sparse remarks touched upon topics far removed from church affairs. Alice, too, seemed strangely disinclined to conversation. The husband knew her face and its varying moods so well that he could see she was labouring under some very powerful and deep emotion. No doubt it was the sermon, the oratorical swing of which still tingled in his own blood, that had so affected her. If she had said so it would have pleased him, but she said nothing.

After dinner Brother Soulsby disappeared in his bedroom, with the remark that he guessed he would lie down a while. Sister Soulsby put on her bonnet, and, explaining that she always prepared herself for an evening's work by a long, solitary walk, quitted the house. Alice, after she had put the dinner-things away, went upstairs, and stayed there. Left to himself, Theron spent the afternoon in the easy-chair, and, in the inter-

vals of confused introspection, read "Recollections of my Youth" again from cover to cover.

He went through the remarkable experiences attending the opening of the revival, when evening came, as one in a dream. Long before the hour for the service arrived, the sexton came in to tell him that the church was already nearly full, and that it was going to be impossible to preserve any distinction in the matter of pews. When the party from the parsonage went over—after another cold and mostly silent meal—it was to find the interior of the church densely packed, and people being turned away from the doors.

Theron was supposed to preside over what followed, and he did sit in the central chair in the pulpit, between the Presiding Elder and Brother Soulsby, and on the several needful occasions did rise and perfunctorily make the formal remarks required of him. The Elder preached a short but vigorously phrased sermon. The Soulsbys sang three or four times—on each occasion with familiar hymnal words set to novel concerted music—and then separately exhorted the assemblage. The husband's part seemed well done. If his speech lacked some of the fire of the divine girdings which older Methodists recalled, it still led straight, and with kindling fervency, up to a season of power. The wife took up the word as he sat down. She had risen from one of the side-seats, and, speaking as she walked, she moved forward

till she stood within the altar-rail, immediately under the pulpit, and from this place, facing the listening throng, she delivered her harangue. Those who watched her words most intently got the least sense of meaning from them. The phrases were all familiar enough—"Jesus a very present Help," "Sprinkled by the Blood," "Comforted by the Word," "Sanctified by the Spirit," "Born into the Kingdom," and a hundred others—but it was as in the case of her singing: the words were old; the music was new.

What Sister Soulsby said did not matter. The way she said it—the splendid, searching sweep of her great eyes; the vibrating roll of her voice, now full of tears, now scornful, now boldly, jubilantly triumphant; the sympathetic swaying of her willowy figure under the stress of her emotions—was all wonderful. When she had finished, and stood, flushed and panting, beneath the shadow of the pulpit, she held up a hand deprecatingly as the resounding "Amens!" and "Bless the Lords!" began to well up about her.

"You have heard us sing," she said, smiling to apologise for her shortness of breath. "Now we want to hear *you* sing!"

Her husband had risen as she spoke, and on the instant, with a far greater volume of voice than they had hitherto disclosed, the two began "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" in the old familiar tune. It did not need

Sister Soulsby's urgent and dramatic gesture to lift people to their feet. The whole assemblage sprang up, and under the guidance of these two powerful leading voices, thundered the noble hymn out as Octavius had never heard it before.

While its echoes were still alive the woman began speaking again.

"Don't sit down!" she cried. "You would stand up if the President of the United States was going by, even if he was only going fishing. How much more should you stand up in honour of living souls passing forward to find their Saviour!"

The psychological moment was upon them. Groans and cries arose, and a palpable ferment stirred the throng. The exhortation to sinners to declare themselves, to come to the altar, was not only on the revivalist's lips; it seemed to quiver in the very air, to be borne on every inarticulate exclamation in the clamour of the brethren. A young woman, with a dazed and startled look in her eyes, rose in the body of the church, tremblingly hesitated for a moment, and then, with bowed head and blushing cheeks, pressed her way out from the end of a crowded pew and down the aisle to the rail. A triumphant outburst of welcoming ejaculations swelled to the roof as she knelt there, and under its impetus others followed her example. With interspersed snatches of song and shouted encouragements,

the excitement reached its height only when twoscore people, mostly young, were tightly clustered upon their knees about the rail and in the space opening upon the aisle. Above the confusion of penitential sobs and moans, and the hysterical murmurings of members whose conviction of entire sanctity kept them in their seats, could be heard the voices of the Presiding Elder, the Soulsbys, and the elderly deacons of the church, who moved about among the kneeling mourners, bending over them and patting their shoulders, and calling out to them, "Fasten your thoughts on Jesus!" "Oh, the precious Blood!" "Blessed be His Name!" "Seek Him, and ye shall find Him!" "Cling to Jesus, and Him crucified!"

The Rev. Theron Ware did not with the others descend from the pulpit. Seated where he could not see Sister Soulsby, he had failed utterly to be moved by the wave of enthusiasm she had evoked. What he heard her say disappointed him. He had expected from her more originality, more spice of her own idiomatic, individual sort. He viewed with a cold sense of aloofness the evidences of her success, when they began to come forward and abase themselves at the altar. The instant resolve that, come what might, he would not go down there among them sprang up ready made in his mind. He saw his two companions pass him and descend the pulpit stairs, and their action only

hardened his resolution. If an excuse were needed, he was presiding, and the place to preside in was the pulpit; but he waived in his mind the whole question of an excuse.

After a little he put his hand over his face, leaning the elbow forward on the reading-desk. The scene below would have thrilled him to the marrow six months—yes, three months ago. He put a finger across his eyes now to half-shut it out. The spectacle of these silly young “mourners”—kneeling they knew not why, trembling at they could not tell what, pledging themselves frantically to dogmas and mysteries they knew nothing of, under the influence of a hubbub of outcries as meaningless in their way, and inspiring in much the same way, as the racket of a fife-and-drum corps—the spectacle saddened and humiliated him now. He was conscious of a dawning sense of shame at being even tacitly responsible for such a thing. His fancy conjured up the idea of Dr. Ledsmar coming in and beholding this maudlin and unseemly scene, and felt his face grow hot at the bare thought.

Looking through his fingers, Theron all at once saw something which caught at his breath with a sharp clutch. Alice had risen from the minister’s pew—the most conspicuous one in the church—and was moving down the aisle toward the rail, her uplifted face chalk-

like in its whiteness, and her eyes wide open, looking straight ahead.

The young pastor could scarcely credit his sight. He thrust aside his hand and bent forward, only to see his wife sink upon her knees among the rest, and to hear this notable accession to the "mourners" hailed by a tumult of approving shouts. Then, remembering himself, he drew back and put up his hand, shutting out the strange scene altogether. To see nothing at all was a relief, and under cover he closed his eyes and bit his teeth together.

A fresh outburst of thanksgivings, spreading noisily through the congregation, prompted him to peer between his fingers again. Levi Gorringer was making his way down the aisle—was at the moment quite in front. Theron found himself watching this man with the stern composure of a fatalist. The clamant brethren down below were stirred to new excitement by the thought that the sceptical lawyer, so long with them, yet not of them, had been humbled and won by the outpourings of the Spirit. Theron's perceptions were keener. He knew that Gorringer was coming forward to kneel beside Alice. The knowledge left him curiously undisturbed. He saw the lawyer advance, gently insinuate himself past the form of some kneeling mourner who was in his way, and drop on his knees close beside the bowed figure of Alice. The two touched shoulders as they

bent forward beneath Sister Soulsby's outstretched hands, held over them as in a blessing. Theron looked fixedly at them, and professed to himself that he was barely interested.

A little afterward he was standing up in his place and reading aloud a list of names which one of the stewards had given him. They were the names of those who had asked that evening to be taken into the church as members on probation. The sounds of the recent excitement were all hushed now, save as two or three enthusiasts in a corner raised their voices in abrupt greeting of each name in its turn, but Theron felt somehow that this noise had been transferred to the inside of his head. A continuous buzzing went on there, so that the sound of his voice was far off and unfamiliar in his ears.

He read through the list, comprising some fifteen items, and pronounced the names with great distinctness. It was necessary to take pains with this, because the only name his blurred eyes seemed to see anywhere on the foolscap sheet was that of Levi Gorringer. When he had finished, and was taking his seat, someone began speaking to him from the body of the church. He saw that this was a steward, who was explaining to him that the most important name of the lot, that of Brother Gorringer, had not been read out.

Theron smiled and shook his head. Then, when

the Presiding Elder touched him on the arm, and assured him that he had not mentioned the name in question, he replied, quite simply and with another smile, "I thought it was the only name I did read out."

Then he sat down abruptly and let his head fall to one side. There were hurried movements inside the pulpit, and people in the audience had begun to stand up wonderingly, when the Presiding Elder, with uplifted hands, confronted them.

"We will omit the Doxology, and depart quietly after the Benediction," he said. "Brother Ware appears to have been overcome by the heat."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Theron woke next morning Alice seemed to have dressed and left the room—a thing which had never happened before.

This fact connected itself at once in his brain with the recollection of her having made an exhibition of herself the previous evening—going forward before all eyes to join the unconverted and penitent sinners, as if she were some tramp or shady female, instead of an educated lady, a professing member from her girlhood, and a minister's wife. It crossed his mind that pro-

bably she had risen and got away noiselessly, for very shame at looking him in the face after such absurd behaviour.

Then he remembered more, and grasped the situation. He had fainted in church, and had been brought home and helped to bed. Dim memories of unaccustomed faces in the bedroom, of nauseous drugs and hushed voices, came to him out of the night-time. Now that he thought of it, he was a sick man. Having settled this, he went off to sleep again, a feverish and broken sleep, and remained in this state most of the time for the following twenty-four hours. In the brief, though numerous, intervals of waking he found certain things clear in his mind. One was, that he was annoyed with Alice, but would dissemble his feelings. Another was, that it was much pleasanter to be ill than to be forced to attend and take part in those revival meetings. These two ideas came and went in a lazy, drowsy fashion, mixing themselves up with other vagrant fancies, yet always remaining on top.

In the evening the singing from the church next door filled his room. The Soulsbys' part of it was worth keeping awake for. He turned over and deliberately dozed when the congregation sang.

Alice came up a number of times during the day, to ask how he felt, and to bring him broth or toast-water. On several occasions, when he heard her step,

the perverse inclination mastered him to shut his eyes and pretend to be asleep, so that she might tiptoe out again. She had a depressed and thoughtful air, and spoke to him like one whose mind was on something else. Neither of them alluded to what had happened the previous evening. Toward the close of the long day she came to ask him whether he would prefer her to remain in the house, instead of attending the meeting.

“Go by all means,” he said almost curtly.

The Presiding Elder and the Sunday-school superintendent called early Tuesday morning at the parsonage to make brotherly inquiries, and Theron was feeling so much better that he himself suggested their coming upstairs to see him. The Elder was in good spirits; he smiled approvingly, and even put in a jovial word or two, while the superintendent sketched for the invalid in a cheerful way the leading incidents of the previous evening.

There had been an enormous crowd, even greater than that of Sunday night, and everybody had been looking forward to another notable and exciting season of grace. These expectations were especially heightened when Sister Soulsby ascended the pulpit stairs and took charge of the proceedings. She deferred to Paul’s views about women preachers on Sundays, she said, but on weekdays she had just as much right to snatch brands

from the burning as Paul, or Peter, or any other man. She went on like that, in a breezy, off-hand fashion which tickled the audience immensely, and led to the liveliest anticipations of what would happen when she began upon the evening's harvest of souls.

But it was something else that happened. At a signal from Sister Soulsby the stewards got up and, in an unconcerned sort of way, went through the throng to the rear of the church, locked the doors, and put the keys in their pockets. The sister dryly explained now to the surprised congregation that there was a season for all things, and that on the present occasion they would suspend the glorious work of redeeming fallen human nature, and take up instead the equally noble task of raising some fifteen hundred dollars which the church needed in its business. The doors would only be opened again when this had been accomplished.

The brethren were much taken aback by this trick, and they permitted themselves to exchange a good many scowling and indignant glances, the while their professional visitors sang another of their delightfully novel sacred duets. Its charm of harmony for once fell upon unsympathetic ears. But then Sister Soulsby began another monologue, defending this way of collecting money, chaffing the assemblage with bright-eyed impudence on their having been trapped, and scoring,

one after another, neat and jocose little personal points on local characteristics, at which everybody but the individual touched grinned broadly. She was so droll and cheeky, and withal effective, in her talk that she quite won the crowd over. She told a story about a woodchuck which fairly brought down the house.

"A man," she began, with a quizzical twinkle in her eye, "told me once about hunting a woodchuck with a pack of dogs, and they chased it so hard that it finally escaped only by climbing a butternut-tree. 'But, my friend,' I said to him, 'woodchucks can't climb trees—butternut-trees or any other kind—and you know it!' All he said in reply to me was, 'This woodchuck *had* to climb a tree!' And that's the way with this congregation. You think you can't raise fifteen hundred dollars, but you've *got* to."

So it went on. She set them all laughing, and then, with a twist of the eyes and a change of voice, lo and behold! she had them nearly crying in the same breath. Under the pressure of these jumbled emotions, brethren began to rise up in their pews and say what they would give. The wonderful woman had something smart and apt to say about each fresh contribution, and used it to screw up the general interest a notch farther toward benevolent hysteria. With songs and jokes and impromptu exhortations and prayers she kept the thing whirling, until a sort of duel of generosity

began between two of the most unlikely men, Erastus Winch and Levi Gorringer. Everybody had been surprised when Winch gave his first fifty dollars, but when he rose again, half-an-hour afterward, and said that, owing to the high public position of some of the new members on probation, he foresaw a great future for the church, and so felt moved to give another twenty-five dollars, there was general amazement. Moved by a common instinct, all eyes were turned upon Levi Gorringer, and he, without the slightest hesitation, stood up and said he would give a hundred dollars. There was something in his tone which must have annoyed Brother Winch, for he shot up like a dart and called out, "Put me down for fifty more," and that brought Gorringer to his feet with an added fifty dollars; and then the two went on raising each other till the assemblage was agape with admiring stupefaction.

This gladiatorial combat might have been going on till now, the Sunday-school superintendent concluded, if Winch hadn't subsided. The amount of the contributions hadn't been figured up yet, for Sister Soulsby kept the list, but there had been a tremendous lot of money raised. Of that there could be no doubt.

The Presiding Elder now told Theron that the Quarterly Conference had been adjourned yesterday till to-day. He and Brother Davis were even now on their way to attend the session in the church next

door. The Elder added, with an obvious kindly significance, that though Theron was too ill to attend it, he guessed his absence would do him no harm. Then the two men left the room, and Theron went to sleep again.

Another almost blank period ensued, this time lasting for forty-eight hours. The young minister was enfolded in the coils of a fever of some sort, which Brother Soulsby, who had dabbled considerably in medicine, admitted that he was puzzled about. Sometimes he thought that it was typhoid, and then again there were symptoms which looked suspiciously like brain fever. The Methodists of Octavius counted no physician among their numbers, and when, on the second day, Alice grew scared, and decided, with Brother Soulsby's assent, to call in professional advice, the only doctor's name she could recall was that of Ledsmar. She was conscious of an instinctive dislike for the vague image of him her fancy had conjured up, but the reflection that he was Theron's friend, and so probably would be more moderate in his charges, decided her.

Brother Soulsby showed a most comforting tact and swiftness of apprehension when Alice, in mentioning Dr. Ledsmar's name, disclosed by her manner a fear that his being sent for would create talk among the church people. He volunteered at once to act as messenger himself, and, with no better guide than her

dim hints at direction, found the Doctor, and brought him back to the parsonage.

Dr. Ledsmar expressly disclaimed to Soulsby all pretence of professional skill, and made him understand that he went along solely because he liked Mr. Ware and was interested in him, and in any case would probably be of as much use as the wisest of strange physicians, a view which the little revivalist received with comprehending nods of tacit acquiescence. Ledsmar came, and was taken up to the sick-room. He sat on the bedside and talked with Theron a while, and then went downstairs again. To Alice's anxious inquiries he replied that it seemed to him merely a case of overwork and overworry, about which there was not the slightest occasion for alarm.

"But he says the strangest things!" the wife put in. "He has been quite delirious at times."

"That means only that his brain is taking a rest as well as his body," remarked Ledsmar. "That is Nature's way of securing an equilibrium of repose—of recuperation. He will come out of it with his mind all the fresher and clearer."

"I don't believe he knows shucks!" was Alice's comment when she closed the street-door upon Dr. Ledsmar. "Anybody could have come in and looked at a sick man, and said, 'Leave him alone.' You expect something more from a doctor. It's his

business to say what *to* do. And I suppose he'll charge two dollars for just telling me that my husband was resting!"

"No," said Brother Soulsby; "he said he never practised, and that he would come only as a friend."

"Well, it isn't my idea of a friend, not to prescribe a single thing," protested Alice.

Yet it seemed that no prescription was needed after all. The next morning Theron woke to find himself feeling quite restored in spirits and nerves. He sat up in bed, and after an instant of weakly giddiness, recognised that he was all right again. Greatly pleased, he got up and proceeded to dress himself. There were little recurring hints of faintness and vertigo while he was shaving, but he had the sense to refer these to the fact that he was very, very hungry. He went downstairs, and smiled with the pleased pride of a child at the surprise which his appearance at the door created. Alice and the Soulsbys were at breakfast. He joined them, and ate voraciously, declaring that it was worth a month's illness to have things taste so good once more.

"You still look white as a sheet," said Alice warningly. "If I were you, I'd be careful in my diet for a spell yet."

For answer, Theron let Sister Soulsby help him again to ham and eggs. He talked exclusively to Sister

Soulsby, or rather invited her by his manner to talk to him, and listened and watched her with indolent content. There was a sort of happy and purified languor in his physical and mental being, which needed and appreciated just this—to sit next a bright and attractive woman at a good breakfast, and be ministered to by her sprightly conversation, by the flash of her informing and inspiring eyes, and the nameless sense of support and repose which her near proximity exhaled. He felt himself figuratively leaning against Sister Soulsby's buoyant personality, and resting.

Brother Soulsby, like the intelligent creature he was, ate his breakfast in peace, but Alice would interpose remarks from time to time. Theron was conscious of a certain annoyance at this, and knew that he was showing it by an exaggerated display of interest in everything Sister Soulsby said, and persisted in it. There trembled in the background of his thoughts ever and again the recollection of a grievance against his wife—an offence which she had committed—but he put it aside as something to be grappled and dealt with when he felt again like taking up the serious and disagreeable things of life. For the moment he desired only to be amused by Sister Soulsby. Her casual mention of the fact that she and her husband were taking their departure that very day appealed to him as an added reason for devoting his entire attention to her.

"You mustn't forget that famous talking-to you threatened me with; that 'regular hoeing-over,' you know," he reminded her when he found himself alone with her after breakfast. He smiled as he spoke, in frank enjoyment of the prospect.

Sister Soulsby nodded, and aided with a roll of her eyes the effect of mock-menace in her uplifted forefinger. "Oh, never fear!" she cried. "You'll catch it hot and strong. But that'll keep till afternoon. Tell me, do you feel strong enough to go in next door and attend the trustees' meeting this forenoon? It's rather important that you should be there, if you can spur yourself up to it. By the way, you haven't asked what happened at the Quarterly Conference yesterday."

Theron sighed, and made a little grimace of repugnance. "If you knew how little I cared!" he said. "I did hope you'd forget all about mentioning that, and everything else connected with—with next door. You talk so much more interestingly about other things."

"Here's gratitude for you!" exclaimed Sister Soulsby, with a gay simulation of despair. "Why, man alive, do you know what I've done for you? I got around on the Presiding Elder's blind side, I captured old Pierce, I wound Winch right around my little finger, I worked two or three of the class-leaders—all on your account. The result was, you went through as if you'd had your

ears pinned back and been greased all over. You've got an extra hundred dollars added to your salary—do you hear? On the sixth question of the order of business the Elder ruled that the recommendation of the last Conference's estimating committee could be revised—(between ourselves, he was wrong, but that doesn't matter)—and so you're in clover. And very friendly things were said about you, too."

"It was very kind of you," said Theron. "I am really extremely grateful to you." He shook her by the hand, to make up for what he realised to be a lack of fervour in his tones.

"Well, then," Sister Soulsby replied, "you pull yourself together, and take your place as chairman of the trustees' meeting, and see to it that, whatever comes up, you side with old Pierce and Winch."

"Oh, *they're* my friends now, are they?" asked Theron, with faint play of irony about his lips.

"Yes, that's your ticket this election," she answered briskly; "and mind you vote it straight. Don't bother about reasons now. Just take it from me, as the song says, that 'things have changed since Willie died.' That's all. And then come back here, and this afternoon we'll have a good, old-fashioned jaw."

The Rev. Mr. Ware, walking with ostentatious feebleness and forcing a conventional smile upon his wan face, duly made his unexpected appearance at the trustees'

meeting, in one of the smaller class-rooms. He received their congratulations gravely, and shook hands with all three.

It required an effort to do this impartially, because upon sight of Levi Gorringe there rose up suddenly within him an emotion of fierce dislike and enmity. In some automatic way, his thoughts had kept themselves away from Gorringe ever since Sunday evening. Now they concentrated with furious energy and swiftness upon him. Theron seemed able in a flash of time to co-ordinate many recollections of Gorringe—the early liking Alice had professed for him, the mystery of those purchased plants in her garden, the story of the girl he had lost in church, his offer to lend him money, the way in which he had sat beside Alice at the Love Feast, and followed her to the altar-rail in the evening. These raced abreast through the young minister's brain, yet with each its own image, and its relation to all the others, clearly defined.

He found the nerve, all the same, to take this third trustee by the hand, and to thank him for his congratulations, and even to say, with a surface smile of welcome, "It is *Brother* Gorringe now, I remember."

The work before the meeting was chiefly of a routine kind. In most places this would have been transacted by the stewards, but in Octavius these minor officials had degenerated into mere ceremonial abstractions, who

humbly ratified, or by arrangement anticipated, the will of the powerful, mortgage-owning trustees. Theron sat languidly at the head of the table while these commonplace matters passed in their course, noting the intonations of Gorringer's voice as he read from his secretary's book, and finding his ear displeased by them. No issue arose upon any of these trivial affairs, and the minister, feeling faint and weary in the heat, wondered why Sister Soulsby had insisted on his coming.

All at once he sat up straight, with an instinctive warning in his mind that here was the thing. Gorringer had taken up the subject of the "debt-raising" evening, and read out its essentials, as they had been embodied in a report of the stewards. The gross sum obtained, in cash and promises, was \$1860. The stewards had collected of this a trifle less than half, but hoped to get it all in during the ensuing quarter. There were also the bill of Mr. and Mrs. Soulsby for \$150, and the increases of \$100 in the pastor's salary, and \$25 in the apportioned contribution of the charge toward the Presiding Elder's maintenance, the two latter items of which the Quarterly Conference had sanctioned.

"I want to hear the names of the subscribers and their amounts read out," put in Brother Pierce.

When this was done it became apparent that very nearly half of the entire amount had been offered by two men. Levi Gorringer's \$450 and Erastus Winch's

\$425 left only \$985 to be divided up among some seventy or eighty other members of the congregation.

Brother Pierce speedily stopped the reading of these subordinate names. "They're of no concern whatever," he said, despite the fact that his own might have been reached in time. "Those first names are what I was getting at. Have those two first amounts, the big ones, been paid?"

"One has, the other not," replied Gorringe.

"*Pre-cisely*," remarked the senior trustee. "And I'm goin' to move that it needn't be paid, either. When Brother Winch, here, began hollerin' out those extra twenty-fives and fifties that evening, it was under a complete misapprehension. He'd been on the Cheese Board that same Monday afternoon, and he'd done what he thought was a mighty big stroke of business, and he felt liberal according. I know just what that feelin' is myself. If I'd been makin' a mint o' money, instead o' losin' all the while, as I do, I'd 'a' done just the same. But the next day, lo and behold! Brother Winch found that it was all a mistake—he hadn't made a single penny."

"Fact is, I lost by the whole transaction," put in Erastus Winch defiantly.

"Just so," Brother Pierce went on. "He lost money. You have his own word for it. Well, then, I say it would be a burnin' shame for us to consent to touch

one penny of what he offered to give in the fulness of his heart, while he was labourin' under that delusion. And I move he not be asked for it. We've got quite as much as we need without it. I put my motion."

"That is, *you* don't put it," suggested Winch correctingly. "You move it, and Brother Ware, whom we're all so glad to see able to come and preside—he'll put it."

There was a moment's silence. "You've heard the motion," said Theron tentatively, and then paused for possible remarks. He was not going to meddle in this thing himself, and Gorringer was the only other who might have an opinion to offer. The necessities of the situation forced him to glance at the lawyer inquiringly. He did so, and turned his eyes away again like a shot. Gorringer was looking him squarely in the face, and the look was freighted with satirical contempt.

The young minister spoke between clenched teeth. "All those in favour will say 'Ay.'"

Brothers Pierce and Winch put up a simultaneous and confident "Ay."

"No you don't!" interposed the lawyer, with deliberate, sneering emphasis. "I decidedly protest against Winch's voting. He's directly interested, and he mustn't vote. Your chairman knows that perfectly well."

"Yes, I think Brother Winch ought not to vote," decided Theron, with great calmness. He saw now

what was coming, and underneath his surface composure there were sharp flutterings.

"Very well, then," said Gorringe. "I vote no, and it's a tie. It rests with the chairman now to cast the deciding vote, and say whether this interesting arrangement shall go through or not."

"Me?" said Theron, eyeing the lawyer with a cool self-control which had come all at once to him. "Me? Oh, I vote ay."

CHAPTER XVII.

"WELL, I did what you told me to do," Theron Ware remarked to Sister Soulsby, when at last they found themselves alone in a sitting-room, after the mid-day meal.

It had taken not a little strategic skirmishing to secure the room to themselves, for the hospitable Alice, much touched by the thought of her new friend's departure that very evening, had gladly proposed to let all the work stand over until night and devote herself entirely to Sister Soulsby. When, finally, Brother Soulsby conceived and deftly executed the *coup* of interesting her in the budding of roses, and then leading her off into the garden to see with her own eyes how it was done, Theron had a sense of being left alone with a

co-conspirator. The notion impelled him to plunge at once into the heart of their mystery.

"I did what you told me to do," he repeated, looking up from his low easy-chair to where she sat by the desk, "and I dare say you won't be surprised when I add that I have no respect for myself for doing it."

"And yet you would go and do it right over again, eh?" the woman said in bright, pert tones, nodding her head and smiling at him with roguish, comprehending eyes. "Yes—that's the way we're built. We spend our lives doing that sort of thing."

"I don't know that you would precisely grasp my meaning," said the young minister, with a polite effort in his words to mask the untoward side of the suggestion. "It is a matter of conscience with me—and I am pained and shocked at myself."

Sister Soulsby drummed for an absent moment with her thin, nervous fingers on the desk-top. "I guess maybe you'd better go and lie down again," she said gently. "You're a sick man still, and it's no good your worrying your head just now with things of this sort. You'll see them differently when you're quite yourself again."

"No, no," pleaded Theron. "Do let us have our talk out. I'm all right. My mind is as clear as a bell. Truly, I've really counted on this talk with you."

"But there's something else to talk about, isn't there,

besides—besides your conscience?” she asked. Her eyes bent upon him a kindly pressure as she spoke which took all possible harshness from her meaning.

Theron answered the glance rather than her words. “I know that you are my friend,” he said simply.

Sister Soulsby straightened herself, and looked down upon him with a new intentness. “Well, then,” she began, “let’s thrash this thing out right now, and be done with it. You say it’s hurt your conscience to do just one little hundredth part of what there was to be done here. Ask yourself what you mean by that. Mind, I’m not quarrelling, and I’m not thinking about anything except just your own state of mind. You think you soiled your hands by doing what you did. That is to say, you wanted *all* the dirty work done by other people. That’s it, isn’t it?”

The Rev. Mr. Ware sat up, in turn, and looked doubtfully into his companion’s face.

“Oh, we were going to be frank, you know,” she added, with a pleasant play of mingled mirth and honest liking in her eyes.

“No,” he said, picking his words; “my point would rather be that—that there ought not to have been any of what you yourself call this—this ‘dirty work.’ *That* is my feeling.”

“Now we’re getting at it,” said Sister Soulsby briskly. “My dear friend, you might just as well say that potatoes

are unclean and unfit to eat because manure is put into the ground they grow in. Just look at the case. Your church here was running behind every year. Your people had got into a habit of putting in nickels instead of dimes, and letting you sweat for the difference. That's a habit like tobacco, or biting your finger-nails, or anything else. Either you were all to come to smash here, or the people had to be shaken up, stood on their heads, broken of their habit. It's my business—mine and Soulsby's—to do that sort of thing. We came here, and we did it—did it up brown, too. We not only raised all the money the church needs, and to spare, but I took a personal shine to you, and went out of my way to fix up things for you. It isn't only the extra hundred dollars, but the whole tone of the congregation is changed toward you now. You'll see that they'll be asking to have you back here next spring. And you're solid with your Presiding Elder, too. Well, now, tell me straight, is that worth while or not?"

"I've told you that I am very grateful," answered the minister, "and I say it again, and I shall never be tired of repeating it. But—but it was the *means* I had in mind."

"Quite so," rejoined the sister patiently. "If you saw the way a hotel dinner was cooked you never would be able to stomach it. Did you ever see a play—in a theatre, I mean? I supposed not. But you'll understand

when I say that the performance looks one way from where the audience sit, and quite a different way when you are behind the scenes. *There* you see that the trees and houses are cloth, and the moon is tissue-paper, and the flying fairy is a middle-aged woman strung up on a rope. That doesn't prove that the play, out in front, isn't beautiful and affecting, and all that. It only shows that everything in this world is produced by machinery—by organisation. The trouble is, that you've been let in on the stage, behind the scenes, so to speak, and you're so green, if you'll pardon me, that you want to sit down and cry because the trees *are* cloth and the moon *is* a lantern. And I say, don't be such a countrified goose!"

"I see what you mean," Theron said, with an answering smile. He added more gravely, "All the same, the Winch business seems to me——"

"Now the Winch business is my own affair," Sister Soulsby broke in abruptly. "I take all the responsibility for that. You need know nothing about it. You simply voted as you did on the merits of the case, as he presented them. That's all."

"But——" Theron began, and then paused. Something had occurred to him, and he knitted his brows to follow its course of expansion in his mind. Suddenly he raised his head. "Then you arranged with Winch to make those bogus offers—just to lead others on?" he demanded.

Sister Soulsby's large eyes beamed down upon him in reply, at first in open merriment, then more soberly, till their regard was almost pensive.

"Let us talk of something else," she said. "All that is past and gone. It has nothing to do with you, anyway. I've got some advice to give you about keeping up this new grip you've got on your people."

The young minister had risen to his feet while she spoke. He put his hands in his pockets, and with rounded shoulders began slowly pacing the room. After a turn or two he came to the desk, and leaned against it.

"I doubt if it's worth while going into that," he said, in the solemn tone of one who feels that an irrevocable thing is being uttered. She waited to hear more, apparently. "I think I shall go away—give up the ministry," he added.

Sister Soulsby's eyes revealed no such shock of consternation as he, unconsciously, had looked for. They remained quite calm, and when she spoke they deepened, to fit her speech, with what he read to be a gaze of affectionate melancholy, one might say pity. She shook her head slowly.

"No—don't let anyone else hear you say that," she replied. "My poor young friend, it's no good to even think it. The real wisdom is to school yourself to move along smoothly, and not fret, and get the best of

what's going. I've known others who felt as you do—of course there are times when every young man of brains and high notions feels that way—but there's no help for it. Those who tried to get out only broke themselves. Those who stayed in and made the best of it—well, one of them will be a bishop in another ten years.”

Theron had started walking again. “But the moral degradation of it!” he snapped out at her over his shoulder. “I'd rather earn the meanest living at an honest trade and be free from it.”

“That may all be,” responded Sister Soulsby. “But it isn't a question of what you'd rather do. It's what you can do. How could *you* earn a living? What trade or business do you suppose you could take up now and get a living out of? Not one, my man, not one.”

Theron stopped and stared at her. This view of his capabilities came upon him with the effect of a blow.

“I don't discover, myself,” he began stumbly, “that I'm so conspicuously inferior to the men I see about me who do make livings, and very good ones, too.”

“Of course you're not,” she replied, with easy promptness; “you're greatly the other way, or I shouldn't be taking this trouble with you. But you're what you are because you're where you are. The moment you

try on being somewhere else you're done for. In all this world nobody else comes to such unmerciful and universal grief as the unfrocked priest."

The phrase sent Theron's fancy roving. "I know a Catholic priest," he said irrelevantly, "who doesn't believe an atom in—in things."

"Very likely," said Sister Soulsby. "Most of us do. But you don't hear him talking about going and earning his living, *I'll* bet! Or if he does, he takes powerful good care not to go, all the same. They've got horse-sense, those priests. They're artists, too. They know how to allow for the machinery behind the scenes."

"But it's all so different," urged the young minister; "the same things are not expected of them. Now, I sat the other night and watched those people you got up around the altar-rail, groaning and shouting and crying, and the others jumping up and down with excitement, and Sister Lovejoy—did you see her?—coming out of her pew and regularly waltzing in the aisle with her eyes shut, like a whirling dervish; I positively believe it was all that that made me ill. I couldn't stand it. I can't stand it now. I won't go back to it! Nothing shall make me!"

"Oh—h, yes, you will," she rejoined soothingly. "There's nothing else to do. Just put a good face on it, and make up your mind to get through by treading on as few corns as possible, and keeping your own toes

well in, and you'll be surprised how easy it'll all come to be. You were speaking of the revival business. Now that exemplifies just what I was saying; it's a part of our machinery. Now a Church is like everything else; it's got to have a boss, a head, an authority of some sort, that people will listen to and mind. The Catholics are different, as you say. Their Church is chock-full of authority, all the way from the Pope down to the priest, and accordingly they do as they're told. But the Protestants—your Methodists most of all—they say, 'No, we won't have any authority, we won't obey any boss.' Very well, what happens? We who are responsible for running the thing, and raising the money and so on—we have to put on a spurt every once in a while, and work up a general state of excitement, and while it's going, don't you see that *that* is the authority, the motive-power, whatever you like to call it, by which things are done? Other denominations don't need it. We do, and that's why we've got it."

"But the mean dishonesty of it all!" Theron broke forth. He moved about again, his bowed face drawn as with bodily suffering. "The low-born tricks, the hypocrisies! I feel as if I could never so much as look at these people here again without disgust."

"Oh, now, that's where you make your mistake," Sister Soulsby put in placidly. "These people of yours are not a whit worse than other people. They've got

their good streaks and their bad streaks, just like the rest of us. Take them by and large, they're quite on a par with other folks the whole country through."

"I don't believe there's another congregation in the Conference where—where this sort of thing would have been needed, or, I might say, tolerated," insisted Theron.

"Perhaps you're right," the other assented. "But that only shows that your people here are different from the others, *not* that they're worse. You don't seem to realise! Octavius, so far as the Methodists are concerned, is twenty or thirty years behind the times. Now that has its advantages and its disadvantages. The Church here is tough and coarse and full of grit, like a grindstone, and it does ministers from other more niminy-piminy places all sorts of good to come here once in a while and rub themselves up against it. It scours the rust and mildew off from their piety, and they go back singing and shouting. But of course it's had a different effect with you. You're razor-steel instead of scythe-steel, and the grinding's been too rough and violent for you. But you see what I mean. These people here really take their Primitive Methodism seriously. To them the profession of entire sanctification is truly a genuine thing. Well, don't you see, when people just *know* that they're saved, it doesn't seem to them to matter so much what they do. They feel that ordinary rules may well be bent and twisted in the interest of

people so supernaturally good as they are. That's pure human nature. It's always been like that."

Theron paused in his walk to look absently at her. "That thought," he said in a vague, slow way, "seems to be springing up in my path whichever way I turn. It oppresses me, and yet it fascinates me—this idea that the dead men have known more than we know, done more than we do; that there is nothing new anywhere; that——"

"Never you mind the dead men," interposed Sister Soulsby. "They have no voice in your salary. Just you come and sit down here. I hate to have you straddling about the room when I'm trying to talk to you."

Theron obeyed, and as he sank into the low seat Sister Soulsby drew up her chair and put her hand on his shoulder. Her gaze rested upon his with impressive steadiness.

"And now I want to talk seriously to you as a friend," she began. "You mustn't breathe to any living soul the shadow of a hint of this nonsense about leaving the ministry. I could see how you were feeling. I saw the book you were reading the first time I entered this room, and that made me like you; only I expected to find you mixing up more worldly gumption with your Renan. Well, perhaps I like you all the better for not having it—for being so delightfully fresh. At any rate,

that made me sail in and straighten your affairs for you. And now, for God's sake, keep them straight! Just put all notions of anything else out of your head. Watch your chief men and women, and be friends with them. Keep your eye open for what they think you ought to do, and do it. Have your own ideas as much as you like, read what you like, say 'Damn' under your breath as much as you like, but don't let go of your job. I've knocked about too much, and I've seen too many promising young fellows cut their own throats for pure moonshine, not to have a right to say that."

Theron could not be insensible to the friendly hand on his shoulder, or to the strenuous sincerity of the voice which thus adjured him.

"Well," he said vaguely, smiling up into her earnest eyes, "if we agree that it *is* moonshine!"

"See here!" she exclaimed, with renewed animation, patting his shoulder in a brisk, automatic way to point the beginnings of her confidences. "I'll tell you something. It's about myself. I've got a religion of my own, and it's got just one plank in it, and that is, that the time to separate the sheep from the goats is on Judgment Day, and that it can't be done a minute before."

The young minister took in the thought, and turned it about in his mind, and smiled upon it.

"And that brings me to what I'm going to tell you," Sister Soulsby continued. She leant back in her

chair, and crossed her knees so that one well-shaped and artistically shod foot poised itself close to Theron's hand. Her eyes dwelt upon his face with an engaging candour.

"I began life," she said, "as a girl by running away from a stupid home with a man that I knew was married already. After that I supported myself for a good many years, generally at first on the stage. I've been a front-ranker in Amazon ballets, and I've been leading lady in comic opera companies out West. I've told fortunes in one room of a mining-camp hotel, where the biggest game of faro in the Territory went on in another. I've been a professional medium, and I've been a professional clairvoyant, and I've been within one vote of being indicted by a grand jury, and the money that bought that vote was put up by the smartest and most famous train-gambler between Omaha and 'Frisco, a gentleman who died in his boots, and took three sheriff's deputies along with him to kingdom-come. Now, that's *my* record!"

Theron looked earnestly at her, and said nothing.

"And now take Soulsby?" she went on. "Of course, I take it for granted there's a good deal that he has never felt called upon to mention to me. He hasn't what you may call a talkative temperament. But there is also a good deal that I do know. He's been an actor too, and to this day I'd back him against

Edwin Booth himself to recite 'Clarence's Dream.' And *he's* been a medium, and then he was a travelling phrenologist, and for a long time he was advance agent for a British Blondes show, and when I first saw him he was lecturing on female diseases—and he had *his* little turn with a grand jury too. In fact, he was what you may call a regular bad old rooster."

Again Theron suffered the pause to lapse without comment, save for an amorphous sort of conversation which he felt to be going on between his eyes and those of Sister Soulsby.

"Well, then," she resumed, "so much for us apart. Now about us together. We liked each other from the day we met. We compared notes, and we found that we had both soured on living by fakes, and that we were tired of the road, and wanted to settle down and be respectable in our old age. We had a little money—enough to see us through a year or two. Soulsby had always hungered and longed to own a garden and raise flowers, and had never been able to stay long enough in one place to see so much as a bean-pod ripen. So we took a little place in a quiet country village, down on the Southern Tier, and he planted everything three deep all over the place, and I bought a room full of cheap good books, and we started in. We took to it like ducks to water for a while, and I don't say that we couldn't have stood it out, just doing no-

thing, to this very day. But, as luck would have it, during the first winter there was a revival at the local Methodist church, and we went every evening, at first just to kill time, and then because we found we liked the noise and excitement and general racket of the thing. After it was all over each of us found that the other had been mighty near going up to the rail and joining the mourners. And another thing had occurred to each of us, too—that is, what tremendous improvements there were possible in the way that bungling amateur revivalist worked up his business. This stuck in our crops, and we figured on it all through the winter. Well, to make a long story short, we finally went into the thing ourselves.”

“Tell me one thing,” interposed Theron. “I’m anxious to understand it all as we go along. Were you and he at any time sincerely converted—that is, I mean, genuinely convicted of sin and conscious of—you know what I mean?”

“Oh, bless you, yes!” responded Sister Soulsby. “Not only once; dozens of times—I may say every time. We couldn’t do good work if we weren’t. But that’s a matter of temperament, of emotion.”

“Precisely. That was what I was getting at,” explained Theron.

“Well, then, hear what *I* was getting at,” she went on. “You were talking very loudly here about frauds

and hypocrisies, and so on, a few minutes ago. Now *I* say that Soulsby and I do good, and that we're good fellows. Now take him, for example. There isn't a better citizen in all Chemung County than he is, or a kindlier neighbour, or a better or more charitable man. I've known him to stay up a whole winter's night in a poor Irishman's stinking and freezing stable, trying to save his cart-horse for him, that had been seized with some sort of fit. The man's whole livelihood, and his family's, was in that horse; and when it died Soulsby bought him another, and never told even *me* about it. Now that I call real piety, if you like."

"So do I," put in Theron cordially.

"And this question of fraud," pursued his companion. "Look at it in this light. You heard us sing. Well, now, I was a singer, of course, but Soulsby hardly knew one note from another. I taught him to sing, and he went at it patiently and diligently, like a little man. And I invented that scheme of finding tunes which the crowd didn't know, and so couldn't break in on and smother. I simply took Chopin—he is full of sixths, you know—and I got all sorts of melodies out of his waltzes and mazurkas and nocturnes, and so on; and I trained Soulsby just to sing those sixths so as to make the harmony, and there you are. He still can't sing by himself any more than a crow, but he's got those sixths of his down to a hair. Now that's

machinery, management, organisation. We take these tunes, written by a devil-may-care Pole who was living with George Sand openly at the time, and we pass'em off on the brethren for hymns. It's a fraud—yes; but it's a good fraud. So they are all good frauds. I say frankly that I'm glad that the change and the chance came to help Soulsby and me to be good frauds."

"And the point is, that I'm to be a good fraud too," commented the young minister.

She had risen, and he got to his feet as well. He instinctively sought for her hand, and pressed it warmly, and held it in both his, with an exuberance of gratitude and liking in his manner.

Sister Soulsby danced her eyes at him with a saucy little shake of the head.

"I'm afraid you'll never make a really *good* fraud," she said. "You haven't got it in you. Your intentions are all right, but your execution is hopelessly clumsy. I came up to your bed-room there twice while you were sick, just to say 'Howdy?' and you kept your eyes shut, and all the while a blind horse could have told that you were wide awake."

"I must have thought it was my wife," said Theron.

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